

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Whatever She Wants

by Edgar Franklin

A Spirited Comedy of Love and Business

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JUNE 11

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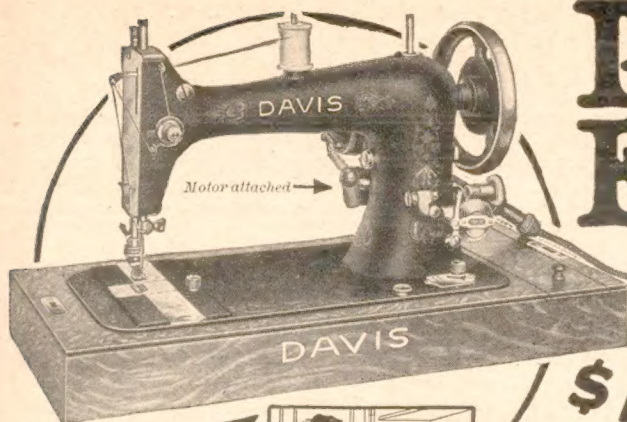
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXXIV

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ONE may do without new clothes, one can make shift to get along for a time without shelter, but food one must have, and so a serial like

THE ONE WAY STREET

A Story of 1919-20

BY JACK BECHDOLT

that turns on the high cost of living in the period so poignant in the memory of all of us will need nothing beyond this bare announcement to make every one of you eager to start in with its opening instalment next week. No fear but you'll turn to it first thing the following three issues.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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“You’ve Gone Way Past Me, Jim”

“Today good old Wright came to my office. All day the boys had been dropping in to congratulate me on my promotion. But with Wright it was different.

“When I had to give up school to go to work I came to the plant seeking any kind of a job—I was just a young fellow without much thought about responsibilities. They put me on the payroll and turned me over to Wright, an assistant foreman then as now. He took a kindly interest in me from the first. ‘Do well the job that’s given you, lad,’ he said, ‘and in time you’ll win out.’

“Well, I did my best at my routine work, but I soon realized that if ever I was going to get ahead I must not only do my work well, but prepare for something better. So I wrote to Scranton and found I could get exactly the course I needed to learn our business. I took it up and began studying an hour or two each evening.

“Why, in just a little while my work took on a whole new meaning. Wright began giving me the most particular jobs—and asking my advice. And there came, also, an increase in pay. Next thing I knew I was made assistant foreman of a new department. I kept right on studying because I could see results and each day I was applying what I learned. Then there was a change and I was promoted to foreman—at good money, too.

“And now the first big goal is reached—I am superintendent, with an income that means independence, comforts and enjoyments at home—all those things that make life worth living.

“Wright is still at the same job, an example of the tragedy of lack of training. What a truth he spoke when he said today, ‘You’ve gone way past me, Jim—and you deserve to.’ Heads win—every time!”

Yes, it’s simply a question of training. Your hands can’t earn the money you need, but your head can if you’ll give it a chance.

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Isn’t it about time to find out what they can do for you?

You, too, can have the position you want in the work of your choice, with an income that will make possible money in the bank, a home of your own, the comforts and luxuries you would like to provide your family. No matter what your age, your occupation, your education, or your means—you can do it!

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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



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Plus 4 things more

By V. K. Cassady, B. S., M. S., Chief Chemist



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Soothes the skin



Acts quickly



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It was not easy—though we certainly knew soap making well. Our creation of the finest toilet soap known had proved that.

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In this formula we found we had at last attained the ideal shaving cream. It proved superior on these tests:

It multiplies itself in lather 250 times. Just one-half gram—a bit of cream—proves plenty for a luxurious shave.

The oil coating on the beard is removed almost instantly. Within one minute the beard absorbs 15% of water—enough to soften the stubbornest beard. Such quick efficiency is astonishing.

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10 Shaves FREE

Simply insert your name and address and mail to

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1929

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ANGORA
FINISH

Actual
Value
\$5.00

\$3.49

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Send No Money



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32x3 1/2	7.45	1.90	34x4 1/2	10.25	2.95
31x4	7.95	2.20	35x4 1/2	11.00	3.10
32x4	8.25	2.45	36x4 1/2	11.50	3.25
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Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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MISCELLANEOUS

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Its patented, scientifically constructed Uplift belt gently lifts and supports the abdomen in its natural position. Stops backaches, headaches, bearing down pains and tired-out feeling.

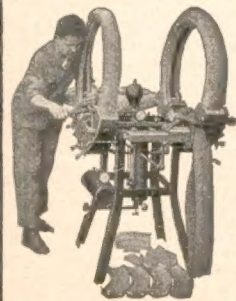
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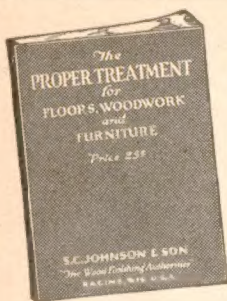
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Whatever She Wants



Part I

by *Edgar Franklin*

Author of "Once a Plumber—," "Everything but the Truth," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HERS TO COMMAND.

THE very woodwork of the establishment—"Barr Manufacturing Company, Executive and General Offices, Fifth and Sixth Floors," to quote the little separate sign in the lobby down-stairs—bespoke the high character of the business.

Pemberton, perhaps the world's one really perfect general manager, always noticed the woodwork when he came down this particular corridor; even if one could afford to rebuild a couple of floors of office building to suit one's own fastidious taste, it was almost criminal to use wood that would have graced the saloon of a millionaire's yacht. That panel in the sales department main door, for example, with its black crotch grain, always brought a little sigh from Pemberton as he passed; he sighed now—and then he quickened his

step, for the buzzer in the general manager's office had buzzed and John Barr himself was waiting to hold communion with his right-hand man.

Pemberton, as was his wont, coughed slightly, paused for three seconds, turned the knob and stepped into the presence of the Barr Company's chief.

Now, woodwork and Pemberton and a variety of other expensive and impressive details being taken into consideration, one might have expected to find John Barr measuring up nicely to the popular idea of a captain of industry—a chilly person of sixty or so, that is, clad in black, with thin gray hair and a penetrating eye. He was not at all like that. John, indeed, had so recently passed the relatively tender age of thirty that only his ironclad rule against giving interviews prevented his appearing every so often in the Sunday supplements as the boy millionaire. His eye was penetrating enough when it lit upon anything

that really required penetration. Capable to a degree, he was unquestionably a most striking example of the very successful young man in business; but, even so, John was little more than a large, curly-headed, perfectly dressed, distinctly handsome youth.

He turned from his desk as the general manager opened the door and eyed him with his customary faint, inquiring smile.

"Well?"

"Well, sir?" Pemberton said.

"Nothing of consequence afoot this afternoon, then, eh?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

John nodded and resumed his cigar.

"So much the better—glad of it," said he. "You're going over to the plant tomorrow?"

"As soon as I can get away from here, sir. I shall probably stay out there over night and put in some of the day after tomorrow. There's a lot of stuff that I should have looked after personally, two weeks ago or more."

"Do that, if it seems necessary," John agreed.

"And you, Mr. Barr? You're leaving in the morning?"

"Late to-night, I think."

"Philadelphia first, sir?"

"Yep. Then Cleveland. Chicago after that. I'll be back by the middle of next week."

The general manager nodded almost solemnly.

"Well, I wish you the very best of luck, Mr. Barr," he murmured.

John Barr elevated his brows and tilted the cigar pensively in the corner of his mouth.

"Think I'm going to need it, do you?"

"Well, I think luck's usually with you, sir," Pemberton smiled deferentially, "and I hope that it will remain with you during this trip. The connections you're making this time are rather important, Mr. Barr."

"They're certainly that, Pemberton—they're all of that," the head of the firm mused. "This establishment is going to make quite a bit of extra money during the next year or two if I get away with—ah—all I expect to get away with."

"And if you should not—"

"What?"

"I didn't speak, sir," Pemberton murmured.

John turned irritably to his desk and his papers.

"Well, *had* you spoken, Pemberton, I should have been downright displeased," he said dryly. "Don't be absurd. We've spent a full month getting these confounded conferences properly staged, and when I'm through with them, to put it vulgarly, I'll bring home the bacon. Why, I *have* to do that! We've planned our whole output for the next year on the basis of the business I'll do between now and Wednesday."

"I know that, Mr. Barr," Pemberton agreed, rather too soberly.

"Knowing it, don't permit it to depress you unduly," Barr smiled tartly. "There's really no cause for concern. I shall do everything that we have planned. There is such a thing, Pemberton, as getting matters to a stage where essentially nothing can go wrong with them. We've done that in this case—or I have, at any rate. I'm going down on the midnight train. Ten o'clock to-morrow morning I meet Fisher and Shay of the International and—eh? Come in!"

He scowled at the little page with the pink cheeks and brass buttons, advancing swiftly with a card between his fingers.

"James," he said, "haven't you learned yet that I see *nobody* after three in the afternoon?"

"Yes, sir!" the page grinned, brightly, "but this lady said the rules didn't matter!"

"Then you go and inform that lady—" began the head of the firm, as he snatched the card and glared at it.

And more suddenly than the glare had appeared it vanished. A smile illuminated young Mr. Barr's regular features; he controlled it almost immediately and his eye was cold as it returned to the page—but his voice was astonishingly soft.

"All right, James; ask her if she'll step in," he said.

He rose, and it was plain that Pemberton's very existence had been blotted from

his mind. He stepped toward the door; and the lady herself entered and paused just an instant to pinch the page's pink cheek; and then she was advancing upon the head of the firm with both hands outstretched.

"You needn't ask her; she'll step in, anyway," she laughed. "Jackie, dear!"

The general manager merely stared. She was really the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. She was no more than twenty. Her hair was dull gold. Her eyes were blue and deep and childlike in a way, and yet earnest to a degree. Her coloring was perfect; aye, and it was more than merely perfect, as the general manager noted in the fourth astonished second of staring: it was real! And having gone so far, and being rather an expert in values, Pemberton turned his attention from the free gifts of nature and brought them to a focus upon the manufactured products of man.

There was a suit, then, that had cost nearer three hundred dollars than two; there were furs which, at a conservative estimate, had caused at least eighteen hundred dollars to be charged off somebody's bank account; there was a jeweled watch upon her wrist which Pemberton guessed accurately at an even thousand; and shoes like that—for only night before last Pemberton had dined with the junior partner of the most exclusive shoe house in town and had talked shop till after midnight—were being made up for the better trade at forty-five dollars the pair! Glorious, dazzling jewel that she was, in her four-figure setting of exquisite raiment—Pemberton, for an instant, smiled suddenly, slightly and a trifle sheepishly. He had never seen her in the flesh before, of course, but as he caught the expression on his employer's profile, Pemberton understood.

"Jackie, you don't mind my running in?" the girl was saying. "We were down town and I—I just had to look at you for a minute!"

"Enid!" the head of the firm protested, with more feeling in his voice than Pemberton had ever heard there.

"Because you're going away to-night, and—oh!" said the young woman, and

stopped abruptly, stared at Pemberton and flushed a little. "I—I thought you were alone!"

"Eh? You—oh, yes, of course. Pemberton, to be sure!" muttered Mr. Barr. "I'd forgotten myself that you were there, Pemberton."

The general manager smiled perfunctorily and headed for the door.

"Well, since you are here, wait a minute!" John Barr called; and from the corner of his eye Pemberton observed that he was unbending in the most astonishing fashion; that he was ceasing indeed to be the head of a huge young concern and was grinning quite like a human. "Just a moment, Pemberton! I want to present you to Miss North."

Pemberton bowed. The girl, however, extended the frankest, most perfectly gloved little hand.

"My fiancée!" Barr added, in a rather awed undertone.

"Just here, you say something terribly nice, Mr. Pemberton," the girl with the twinkling eyes suggested.

"I can do no more than repeat what I said to Mr. Barr a moment ago," the general manager replied readily. "Mr. Barr's luck, beyond any possible question, is the very most wonderful luck in the world!"

"Well, that 'll pass muster, Pemberton," the head of the firm chuckled, with surpassing amiability. "Considering that you weren't given more than a second to think up something flowery, that'll do very nicely. And it's true! Gad, it *is* true. We're to be married in June."

Beaming benignly, Pemberton bowed again.

"And this, Enid, is ol—er—is Mr. Pemberton, the best general manager a man ever had," John pursued genially. "You've heard me speak of him."

"Very often."

"Most amazing chap on earth when it comes to running a business like this, you know. Fact—he is! Why, if I tried to clutter up my head in one month with the details Pemberton handles in a single day, they'd have to subdue me with drugs and lead me off to the madhouse."

"That is just a little kindly exaggera-

tion, of course, Miss North," the general manager smiled.

"It's nothing of the sort, though," John corrected, and bathed them both in the sunshine of his gaze. "Curious. I thought that you had met Pemberton before, Enid. However, you've met him now and he has met you! That's just as well, perhaps," John bubbled on, and laughed outright, with an irresponsible, boyish note of which the general manager would hardly have thought him capable.

The general manager stared polite inquiry.

"I mean that all sorts of things may happen as the years roll along," John explained cheerily. "It may be that Miss North will find she hasn't enough to occupy her in managing me, and that she'll take to managing the business as well. If so, it's quite all right, you know. Anything Miss North wants in this establishment, Pemberton, at any time, under any circumstances, is here for the asking!"

The general manager stared again at his rapt employer, his grin now was positively foolish. Miss North seemed faintly annoyed.

"Well, that's quite magnificent and quite unnecessary," she murmured. "I—"

"Whatever she wants, Pemberton—whatever she wants!" John's dulcet undertone concluded.

"Exactly, Mr. Barr!" agreed the general manager.

And now, since it was perfectly apparent that Miss North had something to say to her prospective husband, the time for Pemberton's graceful departure was at hand. The general manager murmured his polite adieus and glided to the door; and even as he glided Miss North was saying:

"You're coming over to-night, Jackie?"

"For just five minutes, dear," responded the head of the firm. "I have to see Mayfield at nine, up at my place, and he'll probably keep me busy till train-time, talking things over."

"Five minutes!" Miss North echoed disappointedly.

"Or possibly six!" chuckled Mr. Barr.

Pemberton closed the door soundlessly behind him. He was no eavesdropper; but

he was a confirmed bachelor and sometimes the fact set queer little regrets stirring within him. Not that he yearned for matrimony at this late date, of course, but there was a sort of mournful pleasure in listening to this silly sort of conversation. Pemberton paused for just a moment, as further words came over the transom.

"Coming for dinner, Jackie?"

"I can't to-night, Enid."

"What time will you be over, then?"

"About quarter past eight, I suppose. I—why did you ask that, Enid?"

"Why shouldn't I ask it?"

"Only—er—only that, so far as I remember, you never before asked me just what time I meant to turn up, dear," John responded, rather oddly.

The talk was degenerating into drivel. Pemberton moved on.

We shall see more of Enid. It may be well enough, as a sidelight, to note her immediate effect upon Pemberton.

For one thing, Pemberton managed to pass down the corridor without so much as knowing that it contained woodwork. For another, since he was ordinarily one of the swiftest and most accurate dictating machines in all the history of business, it is curious to note that in the middle of the very first letter after his return to his own office, Pemberton paused without apparent reason, pursed his lips, frowned and took to studying the blotter-pad with the utmost intentness. His private secretary, pencil over her book, merely waited. She, of course, understood that Pemberton, with that nice caution which made his letters so incisively effective, was picking words for the next sentence.

It was a long wait, though. After three full minutes the secretary coughed slightly, without entirely detaching Pemberton's attention from the blotter-pad. He did resume speaking, however.

"The very kind that gets it, too!" he observed.

"The—gets what?" the secretary murmured, blankly.

"Whatever she wants!" explained Mr. Pemberton, staring on, while a faint and slightly bitter smile played about his lips.

This time, eyes widening, the young wo-

man straightened up. Astonishment and the keenest annoyance leaped into the eyes, too; as between a whipping at the post and this thing of being caught napping, your truly efficient private secretary prefers the whipping.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Pemberton?" the young woman said nervously, after a swift glance at her notes. "I must have missed something. You said last: 'the overadvertised post-war readjustment having been considerably slower in our business than in many allied lines—'"

Pemberton started and blinked at her for a second. Then, the second past, he was himself again and smiling slight apology.

"Yes, of course," he said briefly. "Will you read the whole of that last sentence, please?"

Without excitement, the policeman on the beat will point out for you the home of Henry North. There is really nothing remarkable about it; any one with three or four hundred thousand dollars to spend can have a home like that in New York. It extends five stories toward heaven, with a little electric elevator to make the complete up-trip a trifle less arduous; it has a ballroom and a formal music-room and a big, comfortable library with a wide fireplace and all that sort of thing. It is, in fine, about the sort of home the average man would buy after accumulating a perfectly unnecessary number of millions of dollars.

Not that Henry North was any happier for owning or living in the house. A shade past sixty, he had retired two years ago from active business, to assimilate the familiar lesson of just how much wretchedness can be packed into a wholly unoccupied existence. He had his clubs, which he shunned and detested. He had his library, in which he dozed disgustedly for long periods. He had his golf, which he neglected. For the present he had his cherished daughter, Enid; but shortly John Barr would marry her and carry her off, and just what arrangements Henry North meant to make after that event had become a matter of the sourest and most sedulously deferred conjecture.

The net result of it all was that Henry's temper had long since ceased to be the even, dependable quantity of the dear long ago. Once upon a time he had been a peace-loving citizen; nowadays, if trouble popped just one eye above the horizon, Henry raced to meet trouble with outstretched hands. Months ago this had been a mere kink in an altering character; latterly, as it seemed to Henry, it was becoming a rather enjoyable obsession. In time, perchance, he would drop to the state of kicking cats and beating newsboys with his cane, laughing wickedly the while.

Down the block toward the home of this sufferer and his only child, John Barr walked briskly through the crisp young evening. Overhead the moon hung brilliantly; John glanced up at it and sighed deliciously, as lovers ever sigh at the moon. But he smiled as well, for he was a happy man. He smiled at the passing officer, who touched his cap gravely to John's evening clothes; he smiled at the tow-headed little child, nose flattened against the pane of the splendid home on his left; benevolently and causelessly, he smiled at the waiting chauffeur by the curb, glancing up at the house as he lighted a cautious cigarette.

The hour, by the way, was neither eight fifteen nor even eight ten; thanks to John's slightly earlier dinner this evening, it was precisely eight o'clock.

And now John smiled more happily, for that was Enid's home just ahead; and now, suddenly, he ceased smiling and stared; for the door of Enid's home had opened and a tall, distinctly handsome young man had emerged!

He stood on the top step now as John paused, scowling. His head was back as slowly he buttoned his overcoat. Even in the dusk, one saw that he was preoccupied. Coat buttoned, he gazed at the lover's moon, just as John had gazed a moment ago, long and fixedly; and then he sighed audibly! This over, he turned and glanced back through the glass panels of the big doors; they were heavily hung and he could see nothing of the home's interior. He hesitated and then leaned over and tried to look through the window; aye, he even rested one hand on the stonework and

leaned farther and farther, seeking to peer into Enid's home which he had but left. This, too, was hopeless; so the mystery straightened up reluctantly and sought the moon again.

"Heigh-ho!" he sighed tremendously.

Then, as it seemed, he shook himself together. He stepped to the pavement and an athletic swing took him swiftly eastward.

"Well—*by gad!*" gasped John Barr.

CHAPTER II.

ONE THING SHE WANTED.

ONE'S training and social position make such an annoying difference when the purely elemental goes to work and thrusts itself into a situation. Reared in the lower East Side environment, John could have dealt with this one promptly and properly, by the simple means of leaping upon the stranger and beating him to a sickening jelly—thereafter inquiring just how and why he happened to be calling on Miss Enid North. Restrained, however, by countless silly conventions, John merely stood still, breathed heavily, gritted his fine teeth and glared after the vanishing form.

But he did not glare for very long. John was essentially a person of brisk and direct action. Another might have hesitated there upon the sidewalk, asked himself a thousand questions, explored a thousand really harmless possibilities; but before the stranger had made the far corner, John was upon the North steps, with one finger glued to the button. The rapt little smile with which habitually he faced that door was entirely missing; John's lips were tight and his eyes sparkled dangerously. When the plump and cheery North butler opened the door, John stepped into the vestibule and, instead of sauntering on as usual and wriggling out of his coat, stopped right there.

"Perrin!" snapped his low, tense voice.

"I—why, yes, sir?" said Perrin, and squinted sharply at him. "What's the trouble, sir? Something wrong, Mr. Barr?"

"Nothing's wrong and—don't raise your

voice, please," clicked from John. "Who was that?"

"Who was who, sir?"

"The man who just left here!"

"I—I'm blest if I know, sir."

"Some one was calling on Mr. North?"

"Why, no, sir!"

"Sure?"

"Quite sure, sir. Mr. North's been dozing in there since dinner and—"

"Who else has been about?" John snapped on. "Electrician? Piano tuner? Something of that sort?"

Perrin stared the harder.

"I—I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Barr!" he stammered.

"Well, I think you do!" Mr. Barr stated, and suspicion welled into his angry eye. "A man left this house two minutes ago; a—a devilish good-looking chap of twenty-five or so—tall and—er—who was he?"

It is possible that, these last ten seconds, a steadily rising little inner voice had been informing John Barr that he had quite lost self-control and that really he was making an utter ass of himself before a servant. If so, the voice died instantaneously! Because Perrin had started visibly! There was no doubt at all about that; Perrin not only had started visibly, but his rather pale eye, which had been meeting John's, moved suddenly in another direction.

"I—I couldn't say, sir!" he muttered.

"*That's a lie!*" John corrected, and permitted hot, strong fingers to close on the butler's pudgy arm! "*Who was he?*"

"I couldn't say, sir!"

"Does that mean that you don't know or that you're forbidden to tell?" the head of the Barr Company puffed astonishingly.

He was big, powerful, and incredibly fierce just now. Unconsciously, his fingers tightened until Perrin could have yelped with the pain; as it was, Perrin glanced fearfully up at him and swallowed twice.

"It might—could have been Mr.—Mr. Wilford, sir!" he mumbled. "I couldn't say, not having seen him. But if you don't mind letting go my arm, Mr. Barr? It's the one that bothers me so with neuritis that—"

"Damn your arm!" Mr. Barr said savagely, and hurled it from him.

But he was master of himself at last, and the curious thing is that he felt no shame. His eye transfixed Perrin for an instant.

"You keep your mouth shut!" he directed briefly.

"Yes, sir!" said Perrin.

"Miss North is at home? Yes?"

"Yes, sir," said Perrin.

Then, having acquired John's coat and hat, he drifted swiftly from the scene; and John controlled himself still further and brought his pace down to a languid stroll; but far behind the easy smile which he forced, the keener kind of observer must have seen burning the fire of implacable fury.

Enid, running to meet him from her pet nook on this floor—which was the little bay window of the music-room—saw nothing unusual, for a moment or two. Radiant, she kissed her John and kissed him again; and then held him off a little and cried:

"Oh! You're dreadfully tired, aren't you?"

"I'm not particularly tired," John said coolly.

"But you are! You know you are. I can see it!" Miss North pursued, slipping her hand beneath his arm and squeezing hard. "Why, you—you kissed me as if you were tired!"

"Ah?" John said simply.

"You come in here, where you can smoke comfortably, and take my big chair!" Enid directed further, as she drew him toward her nook.

John smiled slightly—terribly, too, if one could have looked into his brain.

"You take your own chair, Enid. I'll take this one," he said.

"But—why?"

"Because I want to look at you," John said, evenly, and settled himself in the smallest, hardest chair of the collection.

Mildly wondering, Enid obeyed and gazed adoringly at him. John, as a rule, gazed even more adoringly at Enid on these occasions, but he did not do so just now. In fact, there was something decidedly curious about John this evening—something that grew more and more curious with the seconds, as Enid studied him.

The usual John, for example, never would have maintained that distance between himself and his affianced bride; yet John seemed anchored to the hard little chair, fifteen feet away. And the usual John never would have gazed at Enid in just that manner, either. Why, there was the queerest, most cruel and calculating light in his eye! It was almost as if John were a cross-examiner and—

"Enid!" John began suddenly.

"Yes, dear?" Enid queried. "What is it?"

Seconds on end, John considered his unlighted cigar, came to a decision and replaced it in his case, closed the case with a sharp snap and faced Enid suddenly, disconcertingly, once more.

"This evening there is one thing that I understand rather better than I was able to understand it this afternoon!" John said.

"You—yes?" said Enid. "What thing, Jackie?"

"Something that we shall have to discuss *now!*" pursued young Mr. Barr, and measured every word. "It is just this: the reason why you asked—curiously, as it seemed to me at the time—just when I meant to appear here this evening!"

He waited then. A guilty Enid would start; an innocent Enid would merely open her eyes questioningly.

John Barr's hands tightened suddenly in an awful clench; *this* Enid had started just as visibly as had Perrin, five minutes ago! The start, to be sure, had lasted for not more than the most infinitesimal part of one second, but it had been there! Oh, it had been there!

"Well—er—why, then, Jackie?" Enid asked blandly, and had the brazen assurance to dimple.

John's own eyes opened and blazed.

"Ah! I'm assumed to be as stupid as all that, eh?" he demanded.

"You're what?"

"I'm *not!*" young Mr. Barr came very near to snarling!

This time Enid's eyes certainly widened. More, she rose and hurried to his side.

"Jackie, whatever is the matter with you?" she asked. "You—why, you look perfectly insane!"

"I'm quite rational, nevertheless!" John said, with some difficulty. "If you don't mind, will you sit down over there again, Enid?"

"Yes, if—if you like," Miss North stammered and obeyed slowly.

"Because there's a question or two that I want to ask and that I have the right to ask—and that I mean to ask!" her future husband went on energetically. "You'll answer that question or two, I take it?"

Miss North's little nod was all well-warranted amazement.

"I suppose so, if you'll stop this—this queerness and tell me what is wrong, Jackie."

Young Mr. Barr's lips curled in a small and dreadful smile as he considered her—and considered her further and kept on considering her, second after second. John was the Barr Company's very best salesman; he knew the full value of the dramatic pause, correctly placed. This one was having its effect, for Enid's hand tightened on the arm of her chair.

Then, one would have thought, the tension inside of John relaxed suddenly. He ceased his glaring and cleared his throat; his eyes dropped and studied his fingernails; there was something just a little ashamed in the way he smiled down at them. And this move, too, was having the desired effect; Enid also was relaxing, mentally and physically; Enid, in short, was off her guard for an instant and—

"Who's Wilford?" John hurled at her suddenly.

Miss North twitched! It was almost as if she had received an unexpected blow—and young Mr. Barr turned crimson.

"Hah!" he cried. "All right, then! Who is he?"

"Who is—"

"Wilford! Wilford!"

Enid smiled directly at him.

"What Wilford, Jackie?" she inquired calmly. "What do you mean?"

"You know very well—"

"Please *don't* do that!" Miss North warned him, sharply. "I don't care at all to be shouted at!"

"I—I beg your pardon, Enid. I didn't mean to shout at you. I—I'm a fool, of

course. But not quite so much of a fool as you seem to think!" Mr. Barr resumed, gathering low-toned force again. "Who is that man?"

"Just what man, Jackie?"

"The young man who left this house at exactly eight o'clock, when I was not expected for another fifteen minutes!"

"What makes you think his name was Wilford?"

"I happen to know that."

"Who told you?"

"That's all apart from the question!" John said hotly. "I've never seen or heard of him before, but he was here and calling on you. And what's more, when he left he tried to look back for a last sight of you, and then he gaped up at the moon and said: 'Heigh-ho!'"

"Said what?" dimpled Miss North.

"'Heigh-ho!'" snarled her intended husband. "And it was the most asinine, lovelorn sound I ever heard!"

"And—?"

"No casual acquaintance stands on the steps and 'heigh-ho's' at the moon!"

Enid crossed her silken ankles and smiled happily.

"And because he stood in front of the house and said 'heigh-ho' to the moon—what then?"

John rose.

"Enid, let's have done with this fencing! I mean to get at the bottom of the thing and to get there now!"

"Yes?"

"If I'm not the man you want to marry, if it is necessary for you to have friends I've never seen and have them sneaking in and out of this house when I'm not expected, let's discover it now. For the last time, then: who is this man Wilford?"

Miss North regarded him with a quizzical little smile.

"For the last time!" she mused.

"That sounds quite threatening, doesn't it? You're jealous, aren't you?"

"If I am—"

"Oh, but there's no doubt about it, and I don't like it at all," Miss North broke in. "You are, you know, and it's a perfectly detestable trait, Jackie. And—you'll pardon my mentioning it, I hope—*nobody* has

ever adopted quite that ferocious tone to me before, and I don't like it."

"I ask your pardon again," said John, and controlled himself with a very visible effort. "*Who is Wilford?*"

His very frame was vibrating! Enid studied the phenomenon with a queer, detached interest.

"I *think*," she said deliberately, "that I shall not tell you!"

"What?"

"Yes, I'm quite sure that I shall not."

"He's a friend of yours?" John demanded.

"Um—well, yes."

"You know him very well?"

"Oh, reasonably well."

"He visits here frequently?"

"Off and on!" smiled Miss North.

"Is he—is he in love with you?"

"Why, I hardly think so," mused Enid.

"Are you in love with him?" John trembled.

"Hardly that, either, I should say. It has been my impression for some time that I was in love with you, Jackie. At least until you created this utterly ridiculous scene. I knew that you were jealous, but I never—"

She paused just there. With three strides, young Mr. Barr was standing over her, shaking more violently!

"We'll have done with this!" he stated. "Good night!"

"Where are you—going, Jackie?" Enid asked, rather faintly.

"I'm going to find that hound and kill him! I'm going—" pursued the genial head of his firm, as he started for hat and coat and outer world.

"Jackie!" cried Miss North.

"What?"

"Don't be any more absurd than you have been already! Come here to me at once!"

"Not unless you tell me the truth about that man!"

Miss North smiled a little.

"If the choice lies between my confessing and letting you do murder, I'll confess," she said.

"The truth and the whole of it?" John panted.

"To the very last horrible detail, John—if you'll just come back here while I do it."

Young Mr. Barr strode back and waited.

"Well?"

"I did want to keep it secret a little while longer. If that isn't possible, now that you've gone quite mad—Mr. Wilford is my teacher!"

"Your—what?"

"Teacher, Jackie."

"Teacher of what?"

"Stenography and bookkeeping," Miss North said, serenely. "Are you ashamed of yourself?"

"I—what are you talking about, Enid?"

"Mr. Wilford, I believe. He's been coming here four times a week for months and months, of course, and it's just accident that you missed him a dozen times. And he's wonderful!"

"Wonderful?"

"As an instructor, I mean," Miss North said impatiently. "I honestly believe that he has taught me more about business than I could possibly have learned anywhere else in the world. Really, he has!"

There was something slightly wistful in her smile, as if she asked for just a little approbation. It was not forthcoming. John Barr, descending slowly from the peak of his wrath, seemed to have passed into a fog. He stared at Enid, lips parted.

"Yes, but why on earth do you want to learn anything about business, Enid?" he asked blankly.

"*Why?* Why, every woman—especially every woman whose husband is the head of a big firm—ought to have a business training!" Miss North cried in astonishment. "You expressed that very thought in your office this afternoon!"

"You—you never took that seriously?" John cried.

"I've been taking it seriously for a long time. Suppose that you were taken ill, years from now? Who would run the business if I didn't know how?"

Once more she waited for approbation; once more John merely stared. His lips, to be sure, were working curiously and there was a peculiar twinkle in his eye.

"And I was working so hard and keeping it all for a complete surprise after we

were married, and now—and now—” Enid murmured, and her voice trembled a little.

“I’m getting it!” John said with some difficulty. “It’s penetrating at last, Enid. You’ve been preparing yourself to take charge of the firm—is that it?”

“If necessary!” Enid said, with some dignity.

Young Mr. Barr caught her to him and threw back his head suddenly. More, his mouth opened and a great gust of merriment burst forth. John owned a large, hearty laugh which could be quite irritating on occasion; it was larger and heartier just now than ever before in Enid’s hearing.

“And so you were—well, that’s the funniest thing I ever heard!” John announced. “That—ho! ho! ho! hah! hah! hah! Upon my soul! That’s the very best I ever heard in all my life! You were—oh, hah! hah! hah! hah! A dear little kid like you, with no more experience than a—oh, dear me! Ho! ho! ho! ho!”

Tears, actual tears, appeared upon his cheeks. Enid drew back a little.

“Yes! It’s frightfully funny, isn’t it?” she inquired.

“Funny’s not the word! Why the very idea of—hah! hah! hah! hah!”

“You think I’m not capable. Is that it?”

Mr. Barr gripped himself and gasped his way back to comparative calm. He dropped abruptly to the big chair and drew Enid, not altogether unresisting, to his knee.

“Sweetheart,” John said, forcefully and merrily, “I don’t think one solitary thing about it; I *know*! Don’t ever bother that pretty little head about business again.”

“Well? Why not?” Enid asked indignantly. “There are thousands upon thousands of women in business who—”

“I know all about that, my darling; but they’re not your kind of woman—and no woman has any real place in business, anyway.”

“Oh, do you think that?” Miss North said, with considerable spirit. “Well, ideas of that kind were well enough two hundred years ago, but they’re far, far out of date now!”

“But they’re not!” John chuckled.

“But they are indeed! Why, right in your own office—”

“Yes, my child—we have women and just as few as possible, and those few are there only because they have to work for a living,” John said soothingly. “And they’re a totally different breed of women, Enid. They’re unsexed. They’re middle-aged and alone and without any other interest in life; they’re the kind that wouldn’t have any other interest, anyway.”

“I don’t believe—”

“You needn’t try, my child; just accept it from me, who knows, as cold, solid, indisputable fact,” John interrupted, and real superiority rang in his voice. “There are women fitted temperamentally—in part, at least—for the simpler forms of office work. The less said about ’em the better. You’re not one of them and never will be. So let’s drop that subject *now*, for good and all. Hah! It was a funny idea, though!” John gurgled reminiscently.

“Wasn’t it?” said Enid, in a small, curiously calm little voice which seemed to convey nothing to John. “It would be just impossible for me to make a success of that sort of thing, wouldn’t it?”

“It would!” answered John, with the frank, direct grin he could wear when entirely certain of his statements. “A pretty little chick like you would wreck any ordinary business in about two weeks!” Eyes that still sparkled suppressed amusement gazed fondly down upon her. Their owner, being human, kissed Enid and cheerily failed to note the lack of any really boisterous response. “Ah, no, child,” he concluded. “You stick to the faithful powder puff and the big boxes of candy and the pretty gowns and the dinky little twelve-cylinder roadster!”

“Meaning,” suggested the same odd voice, “that they represent the very top of my intellectual speed?”

“Well, I don’t know that that’s the prettiest way of putting it, but the idea is sound,” John agreed with a chuckle. “You see, Chick, never in this world could you—I say, I wonder what time it is, Enid? I’ll have to race off in about two minutes.”

He thrust out his wrist and stared at his watch. Had he stared at Enid instead, he

might possibly have forgotten all about the time. Yet only possibly and by no means certainly. Nature has made some of us into wonderful business men. Others it has blessed with broader and deeper vision, capable of including many things besides mere business—capable, for example, of seeing that a young woman has been roused many, many degrees past the boiling point, even though she fail to manifest the fact by clawing eyes and throwing around the chairs. John Barr, at least, was a wonderful business man.

CHAPTER III.

WHITHER?

NINE was the breakfast hour in the North household—a sufficiently late hour, of course, but there was no earthly reason for an earlier one.

By nine Henry had finished his hour of lying awake, which hailed from forty years of bouncing out of bed at seven, had made the necessary caustic remarks to Perrin anent the undue chilliness of his bath, had slammed the door and run hot water to his heart's content, had shaved and dressed and was ready to face the bitterness of another empty day.

And then, across the table, there was Enid, and Henry's lacerated soul healed for a time as he listened to her chatter and chuckled every now and then at some particularly clever bit. They were chums to a degree; for Henry, in his present state, breakfast without Enid verged upon mere outrageous impossibility.

So he stared a little, this morning, to find the breakfast-room quite empty when he entered. Not that any young woman may not be late for breakfast, but it was odd that Enid should be late. She was most careful to be on hand when he appeared, whatever the hour of her retiring the night before.

Henry, then, shrugged his shoulders, walked up and down for a matter of five minutes, clipped the end from a cigar he had no idea of smoking, opened a window and sniffed the crisp air for a little—and then slammed it and scowled. The fact

of the matter was, of course, that even Enid was going back on him! Most of his relatives had deserted him by dying. Most of his friends had deserted him by building fool palaces in distant suburbs. Enid, presently, meant to desert him by marrying. This, doubtless, was the first move in a premeditated process of easing him into the idea of doing without her!

"Damnation!" commented Henry, as he grasped this horrid fact.

His collar grew tight, as it had done so frequently this last year. He glared out of the window at the sunny street. It was to have been expected, of course, something like this; but she might have given him warning. Henry glanced at the clock; it was now ten minutes past nine. He bared his teeth and smiled hideously and snarled aloud, quite like a displeased wild animal; he seated himself at the table with a hard thud and jabbed at the floor push. Perrin, coming hastily in answer to the summons, gazed over Henry's head and at Enid's empty place.

"Miss Enid, sir?" he hazarded.

"Coming later!" Henry snapped. "Serve me!"

Lips curling again, he drummed on the table as he waited. Nothing he might not have foreseen, of course. But—by the Almighty, he had *not* foreseen it! Not with Enid! Any of the rest of 'em could abandon him to his loneliness and be blasted! But Enid—

Perrin, wisely without any comment, removed Henry's untouched grapefruit presently and backed away a little.

"Your eggs, Mr. North? Shall I—"

"Huh? What?" Henry barked, as he squinted across the room. "What does that clock say? Twenty minutes after?"

"Twenty-two, sir," the butler breathed.

"Find out when Miss Enid's coming to breakfast!"

Perrin drifted quickly from the room. Henry drummed on, scowling. Really, that last order had slipped from him. He had not meant to send word to her. If Enid chose this way of hinting to him what life all alone was going to be, well and good! She was a woman grown now, and he, like so many million other parents before him,

a plain fool to expect anything better from her! Aye, he was that!

"I beg pardon, sir!" stated Perrin.

"She is coming?"

"Mary says Miss Enid hasn't rung for her as yet, sir."

"What?"

"It's a little odd, Mr. North!" Perrin suggested.

Henry stared at him, an entirely new train of thought sending chills through his whole being.

"Well, of course it's odd!" he rasped, abruptly. "Don't stand there and tell me a perfectly obvious thing like that! Send Mary up immediately and see if anything's wrong!"

When Perrin had left, he jerked out of his chair and took to biting his upper lip. What an infernal ass he was, after all! Sitting here and fuming and thinking all manner of unkind thoughts about a devoted daughter who was probably in the last agonies of—well, of what? Henry calmed slightly. That was really rather ridiculous, was it not? A girl with a night bell to her maid's room and a telephone beside her bed hardly reaches the last agonies of anything without giving some sort of sign. And Enid was perfectly sound; yes, of course she was sound. Last year, when they examined her for the basketball team, they'd pronounced her nearly one hundred per cent perfect! So she must have fallen and been unable to rise again. Just as Lucas's wife, a month back, slipped in the bathtub, fractured her skull and was found stone dead! That was it, of course! Henry turned to speed up-stairs himself—and stopped as the breakfast-room was invaded by both Perrin and Enid's own maid.

They were amazingly white. Henry's breath stopped and he dragged back the scream that tried to leave him and substituted a hoarse:

"Well? Well? What is it?"

"Miss Enid isn't there, sir!" Enid's maid cried.

"She's not—what? Where is she?"

"We don't know, sir! She's not in the house!" Perrin added.

"That's rot! Of course she's in the house."

"But she's not, sir!" the butler puffed. "We've been in every room in the place, Mr. North. There's no sign of her anywhere."

Henry's eyes grew rounder and settled on the maid.

"Her bed, then. She occupied it last night?"

"Why, yes, Mr. North," the woman stammered, shakily. "She did that, sir, but she didn't have her bath this morning and—and her gray suit's missing and the hat that goes with it."

"Hey?"

"And the pumps she always wears with that suit, too, sir!" added Mary, and her voice broke suddenly. "Miss Enid's gone!"

"She wouldn't have—left the house without telling—me!" Henry said, with plain difficulty. "What time do you come down, Perrin?"

"Always by half past seven, sir."

"Pah!" said Henry, and snapped his agitated fingers. "You wouldn't know whether any one had gone out since then or not, would you?"

"I would this morning, Mr. North," Perrin answered unexpectedly. "I wasn't out of sight of that door, sir, from the time I came down till after you came yourself. Nobody went out."

"The locks, then—"

"All three of them are spring locks, sir. Fifty people might go out and we'd never be able to tell anything by the locks, Mr. North, or the—"

"Did she take a grip?" Henry shot at the maid.

"No, sir. I looked."

"Sure?"

"She has three, sir. They're all there!"

"Then—"

Henry stopped. His saner senses were returning; he had the answer! When a girl so tremendously in love with a man as Enid seemed to be with Barr, drops out of sight, there is one solution: elopement! The trifling consideration that there was no conceivable reason for an elopement had no bearing; it never has on these cases. They merely happen.

But they constitute a scurvy trick upon

the fond parent. Momentarily, Henry's blood boiled, as he grasped it all. Momentarily, his eyes narrowed as he made swift search through memory's files. Philadelphia this morning, according to Barr's frequently recited plans! And Henry knew the house where Barr always stopped, too.

"I'll call you, if I have anything further to say, Perrin!" he announced, quite remarkably.

"You'll not want me to notify the police?" Perrin inquired.

Even then, Henry was striding into his library and hurling the door after him. Seething, he seated himself before the telephone and demanded "long distance;" seething, he prepared the few opening words of his address to his new son-in-law; seething, he waited, and since the hour was fairly early, after a rather short interval he found himself connected with John Barr's hotel, heard a final click and then:

"Hello! Hello!" John Barr snapped. "Who's this? Pemberton?"

"You know devilish well it's not Pemberton!" Henry rasped. "What d'ye mean by carrying off my daughter and—"

"Who's speaking?" gasped John.

"Henry North is speaking, Barr!" said the outraged father, with evil calm. "And before I've finished speaking you'll know my opinion of elopements and—"

"I don't know what you're talking about," the other broke in. "Who's eloped?"

"You and Enid!"

"What do you mean by that?" came in a new gasp from John. "Enid's not here!"

"What?" shouted Henry.

"Of course she isn't here; I haven't seen her since I left the house last night. Isn't she at home?"

"No! She left during the night and I supposed—"

"Never mind what you supposed! Where is she?"

At either end of the long wire a mortal hush endured through many seconds. Two men, nearly one hundred miles apart, sat and stared at two telephone transmitters with the same cold horror; but the father's brain worked the faster.

"She's been abducted, John!" he stated.

"How—"

"I don't know, but that is what has happened. Forged note—telephone call—something of the sort—spirited out of the house and she's being held for ransom! That's the best we can hope for now!"

At the Philadelphia end there was a thick, strangling sound for an instant! then John's voice boomed harshly over the wire:

"I'll chuck everything here, of course, and take the next train back. What will you do meanwhile?"

"Get every available detective on the trail, of course. They're mostly downtown, the private agencies, I believe. May I use your office to gather 'em in? It's quicker and it 'll spare us the publicity of a gang of 'em racing in here."

"Take the whole shop and burn it, dad, if it 'll hurry things any, but—find her!" Barr cried. "*Find her!*"

As one their telephones banged down; they were men of action. Perrin, wringing his hands in the breakfast-room, stood open-mouthed as Henry rapped out:

"Lawton—three doors below! Go get him, quick! Stop that gaping and get him! Lawton—Lawton—my lawyer, Lawton! Go on!"

Then, with a whizz, the elevator was taking Henry to the third floor; and he sped from the elevator and into Enid's pretty suite and—stopped, choking! The emptiness of that suite was more than ghastly. Henry's teeth shut and he gripped himself mightily; he had not come here to choke and tremble. He was here to look for clues. There would be a letter or an envelope or something of that kind.

There was not. The frightened calm of five minutes later told him that there never had been. Nobody could force his way into the house in the middle of the night without rousing the servants. Then the message by telephone. That was it, of course. Some one had phoned that John Barr was in trouble or injured and desired Enid at once; summoned by any other living soul, Enid would have paused at least to leave a note for her father.

Or else—no, there was nothing else in the way of possibilities. That was what had happened; all other suggestions elimi-

nated themselves automatically. Henry's keen ear caught the sound of the door down-stairs and he raced back to the elevator, to confront a rather breathless and amazed elderly person whom Perrin seemed to be dragging bodily to the library.

This latter detached himself and blinked his mild blue eyes at Henry North.

"Whatever—" he began.

"Enid's been abducted!" Henry announced. "Kidnaped—being held for ransom now!"

"God bless my soul!" gasped the elderly lawyer. "Where?"

"Would I be standing here if I knew that?" Henry thundered. "You employ detectives, don't you?"

"Why—why, frequently, Henry. Yes, of course, but—"

"Then you know the agencies. Come in here and begin calling them up on my library phone. Say I want their best operatives to meet me in John Barr's office in twenty minutes—and that it's the most urgent and profitable case they ever handled. Come!"

"I know, Henry, but—how many of them do you contemplate calling in?" faltered the attorney as he trotted beside his old friend.

"All the good ones in the city. And make it strong, Peter! Make 'em understand that it's the one important thing in the world!"

"But—"

"Call 'em, dammit! Call them!" Henry shouted. "Get 'em to Barr's office! I'll handle the rest of it alone, if you can't!"

There is nothing particularly edifying in the study of an elderly attorney calling detective agencies while another elderly gentleman walks up and down the floor and urges him on to greater speed in terms that are really best fitted for the ears of a canal-boat mule. We may pass that phase of the hectic morning and dwell for an instant on Henry's words as Mr. Lawton ceased speaking to the sixth detective firm.

"Now you're coming down-town with me, Peter, and—"

"I'd like to!" Mr. Lawton said hastily. "But I'm appearing in the Supreme Court at—"

"You're not appearing in any Supreme Court to-day!" Henry corrected. "I want your legal advice and you're coming with me. I want to know just what can be done to them when we catch 'em, and you're coming along to tell me and plan it out. I want to—is that your hat? Here! Give me my hat, Perrin—all right, I'll get into my own coat. No, I don't want the car; the Subway's quicker. Peter!"

Then they were out of the house and making for the underground, Henry North covering the blocks with giant strides, his attorney panting and trotting and hopping in the effort to remain by his side.

Osborne, chief clerk of the Barr sales department, met them in the anteroom with a swift message for Henry. John had called up while waiting for his train; he was on the way now; meanwhile, his private offices were at Mr. North's disposal, and nine men already awaited Mr. North in there. Henry brushed by Osborne during the last sentence and hurtled into John's own domain.

Men indeed were waiting—short men and tall men, all close lipped and sharp-eyed, all rather husky of build and visibly alert, quite according to the best traditions of the detective. More men came just at their heels. A further contingent was announced by the page as the next elevator came up—and after that, Peter Lawton having checked up in a rather bewildered and quavering voice, all hands seemed to be present and the doors were locked.

Henry's recital was brief enough. A matter of ten minutes and he would have sent the gathering into the outer world to hunt down Enid and bring her abductors to justice; but the gathering seemed to have turned languid. Individually and collectively, it wished to ask questions and did ask them—questions by the thousand, most of them impressing Henry as pure idiocy. Still, there was a certain point to many of them, and the askers were supposed to know their business; Henry answered patiently, roving back into his daughter's blameless past life, conjuring his brain in the most futile way to locate a casual acquaintance or two who was no casual acquaintance at all.

John arrived before the ending of the conference. John was of assistance, too, for the messenger who had been sent to the North home for pictures of Enid seemed to have been himself abducted—whereas John's upper drawer held a very splendid portrait of the young woman. Slowly, they passed it from hand to hand; carefully, one by one, they committed to memory the lovely features.

And then, at last, the little army filed out; and behind remained only one slight, thin-nosed person of fifty or so who loitered with:

"Can I have just one more look at that picture?"

He took it and studied it anew. He nodded and handed it back.

"There's a reward of five thousand dollars, the way I understand it, for the guy that brings back this young woman, safe and sound?"

"And ten—gad! I'll make it *twenty* thousand—for the conviction of the gang that got her!" said Henry.

"Sure," agreed the slight operative, unemotionally. "But first about this other reward. Would you wish the young lady returned to her office when she's found or returned to her house?"

John and Henry exchanged glances.

"I spotted you as being the least intelligent of the lot," Henry stated, with charming directness, "but if you mean to work on this case at all, will you please stop asking absurd questions and get out and *work on it?*"

The detective eyed him for a matter of five seconds, with a stare that was speculative in an apathetic way. Then he adjusted his hat and nodded.

"I sure will; I'll do that little thing!" he said gravely. "I'll start doing that little thing right away, Mr. North. Good morning."

Gently he closed the door after him. John dropped into a chair—a wild-eyed, hard-breathing John, with rumpled hair and a crooked necktie.

"Are they all like that, do you suppose?" he asked bitterly. "All as stupid as that one, but most of them managing to keep it under cover better?"

"Are they, Peter?" Henry North barked. "You know the tribe better than I do."

"They're the best men in town," the lawyer said drearily, "and I should say that you had about all of them. Do you want me to stay here any longer?"

"Eh? No. Clear out if you like. Stay where I can catch you on the phone at short notice, Peter, please."

He watched the lawyer depart; then, alone with John Barr, something in Henry North seemed to give suddenly. In the stillness of the emptied office, the terrific energy of the last hour was dribbling visibly from him; Henry groaned and fumbled his way to an armchair, to drop therein with another groan. Down he sagged and farther down, staring at John Barr.

"And now there's nothing to do but—wait! *Wait!*" he said thickly.

John's fingers were drumming on the desk much as Henry's fingers had drummed upon the breakfast table. John's eyes were kindling dark fire, too.

"Was there anything—else?" he asked sharply. "Anything I didn't hear you tell them?"

"Of course not, John," Henry sighed heavily. "She went to bed as usual; she came and kissed me good night as usual; there was never a hint of anything odd about her—unless it was that she seemed a trifle preoccupied; and it's likely that I imagined that. And this morning she was—gone, John! Just gone, and—"

"And you never even suspected the real reason!" John cried, with surpassing bitterness, and bounded from his chair, to thrust hands in his pocket and glare at the astonished older gentleman.

"The what?"

"Since you hadn't spoken of it, I didn't want to speak of it, even before old Lawton, but—*the man Wilford!*"

"Hey?" cried Henry. "The shorthand fellow?"

"She's gone with him!" burst from John Barr.

"That—that's impossible!"

"Is it? Well, it's the truth, nevertheless. And *you're* responsible!" John cried and pointed a trembling finger at Henry. "You knew and you permitted it! You let a ro-

mantic, susceptible girl like Enid pass hours on end alone with a scoundrel of that cheaply handsome type. Good Lord, can't you piece it all out for yourself? Can't you understand how artfully a cur like that, scheming for the girl and her money, could fill her mind with the idea that *I* was too busy to devote myself to her; that *I* would be certain to neglect her in later years! Can't you picture—"

"No, I can't!" said Henry hoarsely as he tottered to his feet and looked around quite wildly. "I think you're insane. Why, Frank Wilford isn't that sort, John! I—I knew his father well, years ago. I knew his mother and—"

John stopped short before him, hands clenched, eyes flaming.

"All right, then!" he cried. "Even if you knew his great-great-grandfathers and grandmothers, if that hound's in New York City at this minute I'll go and get down on my knees before him and apologize. Where does he live? Where does he work? How can we settle that part of it?"

"I might call up his home, but—"

"Do it! And if I'm wrong I'll apologize. But I'm not wrong," John said with a sudden-burst of awful laughter. "I was right last night, and I'm right now. When a man heigh-ho's at the moon like that— Will you call up?"

"I—yes, John," Henry murmured thinly, as his uncertain fingers gripped the telephone and his scared eyes avoided John's.

Thick, vibrating silence filled the office while Henry waited; thicker and more stunning silence packed the three seconds that followed his brief conversation.

"He's gone to Boston," Henry just contrived. "His—people know nothing about it, apparently; that was his father. He was called suddenly, they said, and left on the midnight— What are you doing?"

John Barr pushed in the upper drawer of his desk and smiled strangely at the automatic pistol in his hand. A twitch, and the magazine lay in his palm; it was quite filled with cartridges. John snapped it back into place and dropped the weapon in his pocket.

"I'm going after them!" he said, and snatched the telephone quite roughly

from his lately prospective father-in-law. "Hello! Call the railroad and have a special train for Boston run out for me! What? *Instantly!* The price is no object. And then send out a boy to find a taxi and have it down-stairs for me inside of three minutes. Good-by," John concluded as he reached for hat and coat.

"John, you—" Henry cried.

"I'm going to kill him!" John announced very quietly; and there was an expression about his lips such as Henry had never seen before in all his days. "If it takes me a week or a month or from now till the day I die, if it lands me in the electric chair or the torture chamber, *I'll find him and kill him!*"

"But—John—" Henry sought to protest.

The closing of the door cut off his sentence. Henry, for the moment a man of cold jelly, collapsed into the armchair again, merely mouthing. His sharp ear caught the sound of John's heels for an instant as they reached the far corridor that gave on the concern's two private elevators. Then a gate slammed, and John was on his maddened way, to Boston and to trouble of the most distressingly certain variety.

CHAPTER IV.

ACCORDING TO INSTRUCTIONS.

SO many executives of the larger kind seem to be perfect gluttons for hard work—which, it is barely possible, is the reason for their having attained the larger-executive estate. Pemberton was a glittering example of this class. If it be possible for a man to worship unending and genuinely strenuous labor, that is precisely what Pemberton did.

During the average day it was his pleasing custom to exhaust at least three stenographers and to set half a dozen panting department heads to scribbling tentative letters of resignation on their several personal memorandum pads. At night, in an aged and swollen brief-case, Pemberton carried home a little light reading-matter in the shape of involved contracts and tricky cost-problems, to while away the evening; in

the morning, when the first of the clerks arrived, it was usually to find Pemberton in his office.

This morning he came a little earlier; there was a hundredweight or so of type-written matter to be scanned before lugging it over to the plant. Head down, Pemberton shot through the big anteroom of the sixth floor, with its inevitable half-dozen waiting on the long leather settee to learn, sooner or later, that the Barr Company could not possibly take on another employee.

Sometimes he glanced at them; to-day he did not. Pemberton slid up his desk-top and, gnawing a cigar, extracted the fountain pen from the rack without even removing his hat. As a matter of fact, he had just about one million things to do between now and the time the nine-forty train left for the plant.

"There's three girls and four men want to see you, sir," his office boy remarked languidly.

"About employment?"

"Yes, sir."

"Usual message, William," said Pemberton, and wrote onward.

As he reached the bottom of the sheet William appeared again.

"There's one girl still waiting to see you, Mr. Pemberton."

"Huh? What? About employment?"

"I think so; she was with that bunch," the boy mused. "She wouldn't exactly say."

"Sticker, eh?" The general manager smiled sourly.

"She looks like that, sir."

Pemberton considered for one second.

"Find out what she wants to see me about. If it's important I'll see her Saturday morning at ten. If it isn't get rid of her. Name?"

"She wouldn't give her name."

"Unimportant, then. Get along, William."

The boy drifted out again.

Once more Pemberton's faithful pen raced along its merry way. Then:

"Excuse me, Mr. Pemberton," said William. "This young lady that wants to see you—"

"Hell's bells!" cried the general manager with great feeling. "Is it possible that I've got to hire an adult bouncer to keep that anteroom clear? What is it now?"

"I think it's a card, Mr. Pemberton," said William, extending an envelope. "She sent me for one of these and sealed it up inside and said to hand it to you personally, but—"

His voice trailed away quite astonishingly before the stare that Mr. Pemberton directed at him. Mr. Pemberton, as it happened, had ripped the end from the envelope and examined the card within; at present his hard, unfriendly eye was drilling straight through William.

"I'll have to have you transferred to some other office!" he said. "I cannot have a boy absolutely devoid of intelligence. I—get out of here, you confounded little fool! Tell the lady that I shall be very pleased to see her immediately!"

After that, as William fled rather dazedly, Mr. Pemberton snatched off both hat and coat and tossed them into the closet; he whisked behind the screen in the corner, peered into the mirror, and smoothed his hair with the towel-supply company's rented comb. Then, coat twitched into place, Pemberton summoned an entirely seraphic smile and stepped out to welcome the visitor, who was entering.

Despite the simple suit, the plain shirt-waist, and the far from elaborate coiffure, she was an unconscionably pretty girl. Trim and erect, she surveyed the general manager without tremendous approval, and the general manager bowed low.

"My dear Miss North!" said he.

"Good morning," murmured Miss North.

"At this—er—hour?" Pemberton queried, with flustered anxiety. "There is nothing wrong?"

"Nothing in the way of trouble or an emergency, if that's what you mean," Enid said coolly and seated herself. "I've been sitting out there since half past eight. I wanted to see you on business."

"And if you had given just one hint of your presence in this office, my dear Miss North—"

"Oh, that part of it's quite all right. I wanted to put myself precisely in the place of—er—any girl looking for a position."

She pursed her pretty lips and regarded him silently for a little. Pemberton, who had been speculating most actively these last few seconds, fancied that he caught a ray of light.

"I see! Sociological work of a sort, Miss North?" he asked brightly. "You're interested in that sort of thing?"

"Not particularly."

"Then—er—er—" Pemberton floundered hopelessly for a moment, under the fixed and pensive stare, and then returned to the surface with quite a graceful and elegant swirl: "Well, whatever the purpose of this call, it affords the office undeserved pleasure," he stated. "If you will be so good as to tell me exactly what you wish, Miss North, every resource of this establishment shall be placed at your service."

"Yes, I know that. It may have been a trifle cowardly, but that's why I came here first. I want a job!"

"A—I beg your pardon?"

"Just that: I want a position in this office."

Unconsciously, Pemberton thrust a finger under his collar and tugged for a moment.

"What—ah—sort of position, Miss North?"

"The sort you'd give any other girl who came in here looking for a job!" Enid said crisply. "I can typewrite; I am fair at stenography and bookkeeping, and I know something about filing. Is there an opening for me?"

Pemberton smiled brilliantly.

"If Mr. Barr sent you to me, you may be sure that anything you wish is open and ready to—"

"Mr. Barr doesn't know anything about it."

"Oh! Then—"

"And Mr. Barr needn't know anything about it!" Enid continued astonishingly. "I have a pencil; will you lend me a notebook and try me with dictation, please?"

Pemberton coughed and shook his head protestingly.

"Miss North, the—the mere assurance that you're proficient in stenography—or in anything else—is all-sufficient in your case."

"Then there is an opening?"

"May I ask a question?" Mr. Pemberton sparred.

"Well?"

"Just why are you doing this, Miss North?"

"Because I want to do it!" Enid said fiercely. "Isn't that reason enough? I'm going to take up business as a career, and begin at the bottom of the ladder, and I start this morning. And I'll make good on my own merits!"

"Oh, that assuredly," the general manager said soothingly. "But—ah—isn't it a trifle unusual, Miss North? A young lady of your—position, I suppose I must call it—and engaged to Mr. Barr, you know—"

"Well?"

Mr. Pemberton leaned back and reflectively tapped his finger-tips together. In a way, it was clear. The highly developed North commercial genius was flaring up for a moment in the daughter. That was it, probably. Whether John Barr would approve of all the notoriety such a trick as this must entail was altogether another matter. And it was John, and not Enid, who paid Pemberton's outrageous salary.

"Miss North," he said suavely, "it is an excellent idea, and I'm sure that we can place you happily. As soon as Mr. Barr returns I'll consult with him about—"

"Not about me!" Enid said quickly.

"I feel that *that* is necessary in such a very special case as this!" Pemberton smiled firmly.

"Which is another way of saying that you refuse to give me a position here unless Mr. Barr approves?"

"Essentially," Pemberton purred.

Then he stared a little, for Miss North was quite erect and her eyes were narrowing most peculiarly.

"Mr. Pemberton," she said, "you know how particular Mr. Barr is about having his instructions obeyed to the very letter, don't you?"

"I do indeed!"

"Is it possible, then, that you have forgotten the instructions he gave you only yesterday afternoon? Because I can recall them for you. Mr. Barr said that anything I wanted in this office, at any time, was mine for the asking."

"He did say just that, didn't he?" Mr. Pemberton muttered.

"Well, I want a position in this office, and if you feel forced to refuse I give you my word that I—I'll use all the influence I have with Mr. Barr to see that your connection with this firm ends as soon as possible. I mean that, too!" Enid said hotly.

Mr. Pemberton himself sat bolt upright.

"And I want more than the position itself!" the pretty little visitor went on swiftly. "I wish my identity to remain a complete secret. I bind you to that promise. I shall come in here as—as 'Miss Jones.'"

The general manager's eyebrows, which had elevated, came down again slowly and he shrugged his shoulders.

"After all, Miss—ah—Jones," said he, "Mr. Barr's instructions were quite explicit, were they not?"

"Perfectly so."

Mr. Pemberton rose.

"Very well. Is there any particular department in which you would prefer to be placed?"

"One that John doesn't frequent, if there is such a thing," said Enid, and smiled really for the first time. "I want to be here just as long as possible and learn as much as possible before he ever discovers me."

"There are several. He rarely goes through the fifth floor, Miss—h-m—Jones. Let's see. I'm quite certain that he hasn't so much as seen Lott's department in a month or more. Will you try that?"

Miss North's hand went out to him impulsively.

"I'll love it!" she cried. "And thank you very, very much for being good enough to help me!"

"Oh, *that* is a privilege!" said Pemberton, with a slight catch. "Whatever you want— Will you step this way, please?"

A little sigh of satisfaction and relief fluttered from Enid's lips as she followed him down to the fifth floor. At least, the worst was safely passed! Not for nothing had

Miss North put in the better part of the night, wide awake, in angry meditation; not in vain had she stolen out in the early light and bought a fearful little breakfast at a fearful little restaurant and braved extinction in the subway crush.

And this, apparently—whoever or whatever Lott might be—was Lott's department.

Enid smiled brilliantly upon it all, as they passed the door in the glass-paneled partition; smiled over the heads of the three young men on the far side, causing the blond one at least to sit up with a jerk as he marked her beauty and audibly to say: "Wow!" Brilliantly, too, did she smile on the four mature men, and if three of them merely stared back soberly, the sad-looking one smiled a mournful little welcome at her. Even upon the three distinctly plain ladies, down there at the end of the big room, did Enid smile, but in their case there was no response at all. Two of them stared briefly at Enid over their glasses; the third, with a loud sniff, returned instantly to her work.

And now Pemberton was frowning sternly at Enid herself, was he not? Enid warmed toward him. Really, he was doing wonderfully; he could not have frowned more forbiddingly at the most poverty-stricken waif sent in by a charitable organization. Enid ceased her smiling and grew demure and respectful.

"Mr. Joseph Lott, head of this department," Pemberton was saying crisply. "You said last week that you needed another typist, Lott. I've engaged Miss Jones; she—h-m—has sufficient experience and comes well recommended. See that she gets whatever special instruction may be necessary."

Lott cleared his throat and favored Miss North with an important little nod.

"She'll do well enough, doubtless," he said kindly. "That will be your desk—the third one over there, Miss Jones. Look over the machine and see if it's in proper shape. I'll attend to you in a moment."

So Enid tripped modestly away and looked over the machine, which was in entirely proper shape; and having done so much, she took to studying Mr. Lott. He was a funny little creature, wasn't he? Enid

wondered why John hired people like that when there must be so many impressive-looking men about. Lott, in his late forties, displayed a bald spot, the marked beginning of a tummy, strikingly ready-made clothes, and a visibly good opinion of himself.

He had a chronic trick of frowning, too—not angrily, but heavily, as if bowed down mentally by the weight of large affairs. His pompous little walk might almost have been termed a strut; it was bringing him toward Enid now, and in his hand Lott bore a sheaf of papers.

"Just tabulate these on two or three of these printed forms," he directed briefly. "Date—weight—tare—and the gross over here. You see, Miss Jones?"

"I see."

"Bring them to me when you have finished and—" Mr. Lott threw back his head to scowl blackly at the blond youth, who had not yet finished staring at Enid. "Burkett!"

"Yes, sir?"

"The company doesn't pay you to gaze about the room, Burkett. Just attend to your work, please; you'll find plenty to keep you busy."

The other two younger men chuckled aloud. Mr. Lott straightened further and looked directly through them. They ceased chuckling.

"Discipline, you know," Lott said firmly and significantly. "Just keep it in mind, Miss Jones."

Hands folded behind him, he moved away—not snappily as John Barr or Pemberton might have moved, but majestically. Enid sighed happily and settled down to her work.

The most fascinating part of it was its utter simplicity. One merely looked at some figures over here and ticked them off on the keys; then one thumped the little sheets, one by one, with a rubber stamp, indicating that their contents were a matter of record. And that, actually, was all there was to it!

A certain slow anger welled up within Miss North. It was this kind of labor of which John, quite patronizingly too, had deemed her incapable; this was the sort of thing he had advised her to avoid as being

more of a mental strain than her powder-puff and her gowns. Enid smiled unpleasantly. Not to overestimate her own brilliancy, she fancied that she would spend the rest of the day at this task and then insist on something difficult; visible speed indeed might attract attention and hasten the process in a perfectly natural way.

Enid tucked back her cuffs and attacked the typewriter with amazing vigor—to glance up presently and find Lott regarding her with complacent approval, and actually to thrill at his nod!

Because there was a big scene coming at the end of this adventure, a month hence or several months, or at any rate as far in the future as Enid could keep her presence here from the head of the firm. There would come a day when Miss North would walk straight into her fiancé's office and crisply consult him on some highly technical detail of his own business, the while displaying the most intimate familiarity with its more remote ramifications—a day when John, quite finished gasping, would snatch her to him and, humility causing his voice to break now and then, would tell her that she was the greatest little business woman in the world. It would take time in preparation, of course, and the real value of the scene would depend altogether on the number of weeks she contrived to work for John without his knowledge. But she would manage it!

Enid ticked on more and more happily. To-night she would sit down in the privacy of her own room and think out a perfect system of slipping in and out of here and avoiding John; and before he returned from his trip she would have the thing reduced to a science and be able to walk invisibly under his very nose. For the moment, of course, she was entirely safe because—Enid paused at last and gazed toward the glass partition that separated Lott's department from the corridor.

That funny impression of a man staring fixedly at her from the far side had not been fancy after all. The man was there—a rather wretched and apologetic-looking little creature, middle-aged, rat-eyed, with a shabby hat—and still staring at her. Miss North ticked off another two lines and

glanced up again. He was *still* there, peering and peering, not at anything or anybody else in the whole department, but directly at herself. Miss North drew herself up and faced him with calm, fixed inquiry.

And her own gaze had painfully quick effect, it seemed. The stranger permitted his lips to open for a moment and then snapped them together; he also nodded to himself and turned and came directly for the door. More than this, having entered, he ignored Mr. Lott and crossed directly to Enid; and, leaning close, he spoke in the queerest little undertone, which could not have been audible five feet away:

"Excuse me, lady, but do you mind telling me your name?"

"I—what is that?" Enid stammered. "I am Miss Jones, and—"

"Listen!" breathed the remarkable stranger. "It's all right. I ain't going to split on you—*Enid!*"

An uncanny little jerk moved Miss North's whole body for the fraction of a second; her eyes dilated suddenly; her lips parted; her color rose with a rush and faded out again. The stranger heaved one great, happy sigh and bent closer.

"Thank you very much for telling me I was right, lady! It ain't often I go wrong on a face, and I'd as soon have lost a leg as go wrong on this one!" he said quickly in the same soft undertone, albeit the words trembled triumphantly. "I don't get the idea of the fake name, Miss North, or the idea of your being in here, but—I got *you!*"

"You—"

"Wait, lady!" the maniac urged. "If you want to keep it dark before this gang and go along quiet with me, that's all right; that satisfies me. Only they want you, *quick*, in Mr. Barr's office, lady, and I gotter take you there!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Blondes and Base Knocks



by James W. Egan

EVERY cracker on this old dish has his favorite female brand of beauty, and I like mine blonde. The fair-haired frails tally with me. These twirls with the midnight locks and eyes may be a riot with some, but it's the sunshine janes who knock over yours appreciatively.

I suppose I'll have to admit that a penchant for peroxide pippins ain't a whale of a recommend for a big-league ball-tosser, and old Huckleberry Finnegan, my roomie

on the 'Agates, usta burn me up pretty often.

"Lay off them light-headed ladies, Eddie!" he's always growlin'. "You're gettin' blond in the brain yourself. You chase more dames in a season than you do flies in the outfield. Wanta get canned outa the big show or somethin'?"

Of course he means well, but you know how much use there's arguin' with a young dumbbell who throws a wicked fallen arch

in a jazz parlor and who thinks minglin' with a flock of sweeties is the ice-cream and cake of existence.

"Aw, behave!" I keep tellin' Finnegan. "I guess I'm in there every day, ain't I? Still gettin' the old base knocks too, ain't I? Why the continual crab stuff because I step out now and then?"

"Now meanin' to-night, and then to-morrow night," he chirps. "Oh, have it your own way! Tryin' to give you good advice is like buntin' at a wild pitch. I'll climb off the coachin' lines and let you run the bags wild. See what it gets you."

Mike Delehanty, who managed the Agates, hauled me on the carpet a coupla times, but he was an easy-goin' old boy, and I only got nicked a few berries each time. Mike kinda liked the way I played ball, and he never got very rough, no matter what happened.

I was holdin' down center garden for the Agates. In my first season with the club I grabbed about as many hoists as any cookie in the league outside of Tris Speaker, and smeared the onion close to .300, which made me a fixture. This year my battin' was fallin' off a little as June appeared on the calendar, but the whole club was in a terrible slump. The Agates were a submarine team—close to the bottom.

I had heard the owners were a bit peeved, and blamed Mike Delehanty for our poor showin'. Still, Mike had been leadin' the Agates since Cy Young was a trainin'-camp phenom, and I looked for no change. So I was handed quite a shock one evenin' when I read in the papers that our manager was out. Some bird named Rodney Lane had been wished into the job.

"I wonder who this Lane is?" I gargle to Huck Finnegan. "I never heard of him before."

"He's a young college guy, and I hear he has some highly educated ideas about baseball," grunts Huck. "You'd better be leavin' your blond friends alone for a while. I'll bet this baby won't be as soft-hearted as old Mike was. Take a tumble, Ed-die."

For once I could see it Finnegan's way, and figured I would go in for a little reform stuff. A whole week passed, and I was so

good it hurt. Rodney Lane had joined the club. He was a young bird, and mighty quiet. He wore glasses, and everybody was callin' him "Specks" after the first day—behind his back. We didn't want to get in wrong the openin' stanza. Lane didn't make any changes the first few days, and the Agates kept right on losin' ball games.

Though I was in every night for a week, as I mentioned, I wasn't hittin' 'em any better. Then a dancin' party came up, and a cute little blonde I couldn't turn down begged me to take her along. The party lasted until nearly mornin', and I crawled into the hay and slept till noon, refusin' to listen to Finnegan when he wanted me to get up. Feelin' rotten, I wandered down into the lobby of my hotel a little before one o'clock—and found Rodney Lane waitin' for me.

"There was mornin' practise held to-day, Mr. Adams," he remarks, "and you wasn't there. I want to know why."

"Didn't know anythin' about it," I mumble. "We ain't been havin' it."

"Well, we're goin' to have it right along," he chirps. "At all events, that is no excuse. Your roommate said he couldn't get you up. This ball club, Mr. Adams, is not payin' you salary to dance all night and have a high old time. You'll have to keep in condition, and this little offense will cost you twenty-five dollars. Don't let it occur again!"

"Now, see here!" I yodel, for he made me sore. "I guess—"

"I don't. I know," he comes back. "I'm not at all satisfied with your playin', Adams. Your record is not good this season. I won't put up with any foolishness from you, either. You snap outa this bad habit you've dropped into, or somethin' will fall on you—and fall hard!"

I went out to the ostrich farm that day madder than a cookie who has just missed bein' flattened at a traffic crossin' by a speedin' six-cylinder hack, and I had an awful afternoon. I misjudged two flies and struck out twice with men on the paths.

"I want to see you out here bright and early in the mornin', Adams," Lane barks in the clubhouse. "You acted like a helpless child at the plate to-day."

"A guy can't hit .300 every day of the year," I mutter.

"Not if he insists on hittin' .400 every night," says our college manager.

Some bird laughed. Right away I recognized the party. It was Herman Siegel, one member of the Agates whom I admired the way Sinn Feiners love Lloyd George. This Siegel was an alleged pitcher, although he didn't have any more on the apple than the catcher in tossin' it back to him, as far as I could see. The club carried him, I guess, because nine athletes went suddenly blind one bright day and let him throw a no-hit battle. It couldn't have happened any other way. Even Huck Finnegan said so.

I turned my lamps around on Siegel, and the merry laughter ceased. But I knew he was tickled a fine, rosy pink to hear me bawled out, and I certainly craved a chance to bust him a couple.

I showed up for mornin' practise the next coupla days, and took a lotta stuff from Rodney Lane. I didn't have much love for Specks, and I was sore as a sunburnt ear at the way he tried to ride me.

Saturday night came along, and no practise was booked for Sunday morn. I beat it to a dance where I knew several fair-haired fox-trotters and had quite a large time. I was out long after midnight, but I worried nix. I wasn't gonna be any slave for Specks.

We were playin' the Indians Sunday afternoon, and Siegel was in the box for us. Huck Finnegan boomed one in the bleachers the first frame with two on and gave us a lead. Siegel was packin' a horse-shoe, and the tribe couldn't get far enough around the first six cantos to know there was a home plate. But in the seventh the dynamite went off. Tris Speaker and this bird Smith crashed a couple, and then somebody boosted a high one out my way.

I should have been able to catch that one between my teeth, but somehow my thumbs got in the way and I let the cherry drop. That gave the Indians two runs and put a bird on third. Siegel was trampin' around in the box like a wild man.

Now, of course I didn't like Siegel, but don't ever think that had anythin' to do with me muffin' that onion. Ball-tossers

ain't carryin' their grudges into the game, and I was just about as peeved as any cracker in the park over that sweet bobble. Before the innin' was over Steve O'Neill got a single, and the count was fifty-fifty.

When I trotted in to the bench Rodney Lane gave me a chilly look through those glasses of his, and Herman Siegel was snarl-in' and cussin' until the concrete was ready to curl.

"Take a coupla fishermen out in center field with you next innin'," he gargles, "and let 'em spread a net for you. Here goes a perfectly good ball game after I had it won! If you're an outfielder I'm a cross-eyed cuckoo!"

"Aw, well," I says, "if—"

"If? If?" Siegel growls. "If I had your brains I'd climb into a nice, big sack with a coupla heavy rocks and then have somebody throw me into a river. Any river would do, as long as it was deep."

"That 'll be all!" I come back. "Another bleat outa you and you'll feel like the last sucker Benny Leonard hit! I couldn't help missin' that fly, and—"

"Check your alibis with your street clothes," breaks in Rodney Lane. "No more gab now, either of you! After the game I'll see you in my office, Adams."

That was pretty consolin', all right, and I went through the rest of the combat about as much use to the team as callin' cards to a mountain lion. The Indians won in the ninth, bunchin' blows on Siegel, and he was in a terrible temper. He handed me a sweet set of glares as the crew flocked for the showers, and I had to say somethin'.

"Well, I didn't drop any in the ninth," I squawk. "So you needn't give me a dirty look."

"You got a dirty look, all right," gargles this alleged hurler, "but I didn't give it to you."

Right there we would have tangled if Huck Finnegan hadn't grabbed me. I was still steamin' when I blew into Rodney Lane's office in the grand stand.

"That was a rotten muff you made today, Adams," he says with lovely sarcasm. "A few more like that, and you'll be back at your old job with the express company."

"Any bird is apt to drop one now and then," I remark.

"Especially if he's been out the night before," utters the four-eyed pilot. "I warned you before in regard to this. You have to keep fit to play big-league ball, and you know as well as I that you aren't playin' fair with the Agates. I have a good notion to charge you fifty for this offense—and the next time it happens you'll come outa the line-up and take a good, long rest!"

I wanted to fight somebody, I was that hot, yet I realized Lane had some cause to feel peevish himself. I began to mumble some kinda alibi, and then Specks acted sorta funny. He came around and put his hands on my shoulders—regular father stuff.

"Adams," he says, "there's too many Eves in your life. Don't be an idiot. You can play real ball, I'm sure, if you'll forget dames and dancin' for a while—and we are all anxious to see the Agates up there in the money. I'll give you a chance to do the right thing. I'll let the fine slide this time, to prove I'm your friend, if you'll let me be that. But no more carousin' that is gonna cost us ball games! I'm runnin' the club, and I'm goin' to run it my own way. When I say a thing I mean it. If you fail to keep in condition you can expect no further consideration. I don't change my mind after it's once made up. Do we understand each other?"

"I guess so," I get out, havin' calmed a little. "Maybe I've fooled around with the fluffs more than I oughta. I'm anxious to make good, Mr. Lane, and I wanta do my best for the club. I'll cut out the jazzin' around."

"Good! That's the right spirit, Adams." He shakes my hand and bows me out.

When I told the whole story to Huck he added a little lecture of his own, as I expected, and said Lane was absolutely right. Not bein' entirely a stonehead myself, I decided to make my reformin' stick this time.

I got away with it pretty well, too. A long road trip which came up followin' the series with the Indians was a big help in keepin' the good resolutions, and when we

drifted back to the home egg-ranch I was accustomed to hittin' the hay on a Ben Franklin schedule.

Durin' July the Agates played sweet baseball and rambled a long way up the old stairs. Huck Finnegan, always a curly wolf around the short patch, developed into a whale with the willow, and Joe Ziegler, the best first-baseman in the world, had cut loose on one of them crazy clickin' sprees of his. I had improved a bit myself.

Our delivery clerks were chuckin' nicely, too. Even that bum of a Siegel was winnin' regularly, and the rest of the clubs in the league were beginnin' to worry over us.

Though he wore glasses and was hampered with a college education, Rodney Lane proved a pretty good pilot. Quiet as he was, the club soon understood that he only had to say a thing once to mean it, and I realized I was still on probation with him. But I had made up my mind to breeze through the remainder of the season like a hero of one of the Rollo books. No more skirts this year.

Life is a good deal like a ball game, however. You never can tell what the next play is apt to be. I was headin' straight for somethin', and didn't know it.

The first week in August we were meetin' the Pale Hose in a series on our own farm. I was hikin' up one of the main stems of Agateville a few minutes before we were due to gasoline out to the scene of battle, when I bumped into a girl carryin' a flock of bundles. She spilled about a dozen of 'em, and I naturally stopped and helped her pick 'em up.

While fieldin' her crowd of parcels I got a good, square look at the young lady and—blooey! I was gone just like that!

Of course she was a blonde. She was little, and kinda pretty in a quiet style, with a pair of blue eyes that would finish first in any man's league. I was knocked off pronto, and I knew it. Blondes had come and blondes had gone, but somethin' told me this girl was gonna ring the bell for keeps. I had struck out the moment I faced her. She and I just hadda become acquainted.

"Them's too many bundles for you to be staggerin' along with," I remark. "Better let me help you carry some of 'em."

"Oh, I don't think I better," she says, with a kinda doubtful smile. "I ain't got much farther to go—"

"Please ma'am!" I butt in. "I would consider it a great favor."

She hands me a searchin' look at that, and I guessed I musta seemed all right.

"Thank you so much if you will," she consents. "There are a good many of them. I'm goin' to the Coliseum Theater."

"Oh, you are an actress?" I venture, fallin' into line.

"No, indeed." She laughs. "I'm a mere maid. I work for Neva Newell, the famous dancer, and she sent me out to buy nearly everythin' in town. You've heard of Neva Newell, I guess?"

I had. She was a twinklin' light in musical comedy, and was just comin' to Agateville for an engagement.

"Yes, I've heard of Neva Newell," I chirp. "So you are her maid? How long will the show be here?"

"A month, anyway, I understand."

This I heard joyfully. Before leavin' the girl at the theater I also learned her name was Amy Harris, had told her a few things about myself, and had received permission to call on her some time.

That was the beginnin' of the big game for me. Before August was half over I was thinkin' more about a diamond for Amy's third finger than the other kind. I wasn't flyin' around all hours of the night, however. Amy had heard a lotta stuff about Specks, and while she knew nothin' of baseball she agreed I oughta give my best efforts to my work. She was a grand little girl, and full of good sense.

Neva Newell, the dancer, was a stunnin' blonde herself, of the strawberry type. While no high-stepper, she was a popular young lady, and was entertained considerable. Several times she had invited Amy and me to come along on parties, but we refused.

"I'm glad I'm not a ball player," the dancer would say. "This Specks I hear you mention once in a while must be a tyrant. I never did like baseball, anyway, and I never look at a sport page in a paper. You are the only player I ever knew by

name, and if you weren't Amy's friend I would know none of them."

"Better let me make a fan outa you," I usta kid her.

"You couldn't hire me to go near a ball park. When I was a little girl I heard my brothers talk about baseball so much! They were always playin' it, and I got sick of the name of the game."

I would grin and let it pass. Many women were like Neva Newell, I realized. Baseball was nothin' to them. Even Amy confessed it didn't interest her except for the reason I played it. She only saw one or two mornin' contests herself, Neva Newell holdin' daily matinées.

The Agates wound up the month of August with an important four-game series with the Yanks. Both clubs were up around the top, and we had a chance to pass the New Yorkers if we took three outa four. Rodney Lane told us we simply hadda go out and grab the big end.

Dick Davis pitched us to a win the first day, and Bobby Frayne had the second struggle stowed until the eighth innin'. Then he let the onion slip when the Babe was at bat—and the game was busted up on the spot.

Just as I was thinkin' of crawlin' under covers that night I received an unexpected phone call from Amy Harris. I hadn't seen her durin' the evenin' because I knew Neva Newell was goin' out to dance after the show at some high jinks in a small town twenty miles east of Agateville, and naturally would take Amy with her.

"What's the matter?" I ask. I could tell by Amy's tone somethin' was haywire.

"Neva took sick in the middle of her dance here, and I'm so worried! I'm afraid to come back with her alone. Can you come out, Eddie, and help me? We don't know a soul in the place except the man that hired Neva, and he don't seem to have any sense."

"Sure; I'll be there as fast as gas will take me," I assure her. "Don't you worry now."

Gettin' hold of a taxi, I spun out to the scene of the trouble, and found Amy havin' quite a time with Neva Newell. A doc-

tor was in attendance, and finally all four of us piled into a machine and burned the road back to the city. The dancer came around a bit durin' the ride, and we drove to the hotel.

This was about two in the mornin', and as the doctor and I assisted the ladies outa the bus, both of 'em a bit disheveled, some cookie passed along and handed us a good stare. It was Herman Siegel, my chuckin' friend.

I was sorry that bird had seen us, but it couldn't be helped. When the doctor and I came out a few minutes later he wasn't in sight. Still, I knew Siegel wouldn't forget the incident, and might try to spill it to Specks. Not that I worried; my conscience was clear. I hadn't been engaged in any wrong-doin'.

Our fracas with the Yanks the followin' afternoon proved a hummer from the openin' round. Siegel had been selected to hurl for the Agates, and I noticed he scowled at me when he came in to the bench after warmin' up. Rodney Lane also gave me a funny look, but said nothin'. I had a hunch that Herman had blabbed a bit.

This made me determined to play my best. In fact, it made me overanxious. The first frame I romped clear over into left field and made "Polly" Jones drop a fly which was his. That later was cashed into a run.

"Stay in your own garden," says Specks, when I come to the pit. "You'll have plenty to do there."

"I get wonderful support when I pitch," snarls Siegel. "Of all the class D outfieldin' I ever lamped—"

"If some people would stay where they belong I wouldn't be droppin' balls," garges Polly Jones, very peeved.

"Never mind that! Never mind that!" yodels Specks. "Everybody play ball now, and Herman will hold 'em. We can get that run back. Let's see a few of you on there!"

The Agates got the marker back in the last half of the stanza, through lusty doubles by Huckleberry Finnegan and Joe Ziegler. I had a chance to put us in the lead this canto, but poked a liner right into Peck's hands.

The game seemed to grow hotter with each passin' round. The Babe crashed one of his record clouts in the fourth, and Joe Ziegler evened up by smearing the egg outa the orchard himself. Both infields was showin' million-dollar class, especially Huck. That old boy was eatin' everythin' within miles.

Up till the ninth one easy fly was all I had hooked. Twice I had smashed the cherry on the pick-only to have it go straight at some bird. I seemed to have no luck with the cue at all.

Siegel had been goin' like a house ablaze—and who couldn't with such an infield?—and the score was 2 all when the closin' canto commenced.

Some blind baby struck out, and Polly Jones pulled off a swell runnin' catch. Then the Yanks sailed into Siegel for a pair of neat singles, and Mr. Ruth ambled up to the can. Naturally he never got a chance to take the ash off his shoulder. The pass to him filled the paths.

The next hitter cracked a beauty over second. I came in fast, figurin' to get it on the hop and buzz the orange into the plate. One run was sure to count, but I might cut off another.

I'll never tell how it happened. In some way the pill went through my legs and rolled clear to the bleacher gates. Four big ones pattered across, and every fan in the park kissed the ball game good-by. Meusel popped out to Ziegler for the last demise, but the damage was done. I was roasted all the way in to the bench by the boilin' crowd, and I knew more roastin' awaited me in the dugout.

Siegel was foamn'.

"You certainly cop the inlaid ivory derby!" he squawks. "And my folks usta tell me there wasn't any Santa Claus! Talk about your Christmas presents!"

"Rotten work, Adams!" chimes in Rodney Lane. "Come on, fellows, let's go after them and try to get them back. No game is over until the last man is out. A big rally, boys!"

Four runs is usually a pretty safe lead in the last of the ninth, however, and I felt mighty blue. I hadn't a word to chirp.

Polly Jones was the first hitter, and he

started somethin' by crashin' a triple. Riley punched a safe one into right and a run was across.

"Keep it up, gang! We got 'em!" howls Specks. "Hit for Siegel, Mac."

McHaney, a pinch swatter, went in for our pitcher and coaxed four rotten chucks. About this time the Yanks gave us a new flinger to look over. Bein' cold, he promptly thumped Gordon in the ribs, stuffin' the sacks. Ogden fouled out, though, and everybody groaned.

It was up to Huck Finnegan now, and my roomie responded with a sweet smack to port, countin' one run and leavin' the bur-laps loaded.

"We'll win. Sure as shootin', we'll win!" chortles Specks. "Joe'll bust one. We only need two more to tie."

He was referrin' to the best hitter in baseball, Joe Ziegler, who had already clicked two nice blows. And Zieg came through this time, nearly tearin' the pitcher's hand off with a fearful drive. Another run, and the bases densely populated.

The Yanks trotted out the third twirler of the stanza. The crowd was frantically yellin' and the stage was all set for a great Garrison finale.

I was the next batter.

"Here's your chance to redeem yourself, Adams," cries Specks. "Only one out. Pick out the first good one, and let the crowd go home."

I vowed I would get a hit this time. I had been hittin' in tough luck all day. Now it was gonna be different. As I looked over the first chuck, which was a strike, I realized I had the chance of the story-book heroes one reads about. As far as that goes, every ball player has had many of 'em.

The second ball pitched looked good. I stepped straight into it, swingin' as level and true as I could.

Bang! The apple went right back into the hurler's hands on the first hop. In a jiffy he pegged to the plate, and, desperately as I sped toward first, the catcher's relay beat me there. I had hit into a double play and the game was over—with the Agates still a run behind!

A fine cussin' I received on the way to

the showers. I took it all without a comeback until Siegel gargles in the clubhouse:

"Pretty good, when a bird loses a ball game twice for a guy. Chasin' around all night with a coupla broads and then throwin' away ball games the next day. When a stiff thinks more of a pair of—"

At the next remark I parked one on his chin for my first real hit of the afternoon. Siegel went down and out. Rodney Lane, just arrivin', stopped any further combat.

"I'll see you in my office, Adams," he utters. "McHaney, you'll be in center field to-morrow afternoon."

"Meanin'—" I begin.

"I'll talk to you later, Adams!" Specks shuts me off.

He did. In his office he fairly burned me up.

"I heard all about the party you were on last night, Adams. A coupla women meant more to you than your club. Very well. You know the penalty. You are fined a hundred dollars and suspended indefinitely. As soon as I can arrange a trade you'll get off the team."

"Look here!" I yodel. "Siegel lied about me to you. I wasn't on any party, and I'm glad I busted him a good one. If you would hear my side of this—"

"No alibis, please!" he cuts in. "Your playin' to-day tells the story. It corroborates every word Siegel said. You're through, Adams. When I say a thing I mean it. I don't change my mind after it's made up. You oughta be ashamed of yourself. Sellin' out your teammates for a coupla characterless women!"

"That's plenty from you, Mr. Lane!" I shout. "I won't stand for that! Because I happened to be in a machine with Neva Newell and—"

"Who?" Specks demands, all excited.

"I was with Neva Newell and her maid, whom I—"

"Neva Newell, the dancer? She was with you? You dirty dog, I've a notion to kill you for this! Oh, you'll never play another game of ball with the Agates now!" Lane flew off the handle in such a way I beat it from the office. He was splittin' with rage.

The first thing I did was to steer for

Neva Newell's hotel. I wanted to see her and Amy. This matter must be straightened out with the manager, especially after his violent outburst when I mentioned the dancer.

Amy was alone, Neva being out to dinner with some manager. She was much better to-day, my sweetheart testified.

"I'm in all wrong over last night, Amy," I groan. "Specks has suspended me and fined me, and I guess I'm off the club."

I told her the whole story, and she was very indignant.

"Oh, I'm glad you hit that awful man Siegel!" she cries. "We'll go to your horrid Specks and tell him the truth."

"Why did he fly into such a rage over Neva Newell?" I ask.

"I don't know. I'm sure she don't know him. But when she comes back she'll help us. She'll have to, Eddie."

The dancer, a little pale but evidently able to get around without assistance, returned a half-hour later. She heard all in some wonderment.

"Your Specks, as you call him, is no friend of mine. What is his real name?"

"Rodney Lane—but we all call him Specks because he wears glasses," I explain.

"My Lord! Rodney Lane a baseball manager. And I didn't even know it! Rodney!" Surprisingly she starts to laugh. Her telephone tinkled. Neva answered, and smiled at what came over the wire.

"Have him come right up." She restores the receiver. "Lane is down-stairs, and coming up here," she tells us. "Get outa sight until he goes. I'll handle him all right, Mr. Adams. Rodney—Specks! A baseball manager! I should read the sport pages, after all!"

Badly baffled, Amy and I made ourselves comfortable in another room of the dancer's suite. Time dragged—every second a snail—until Neva Newell called us in. There was no trace of Rodney Lane.

"All's well," observes the dancer. "Come in, my children, and a story you shall hear. Which, I hope, will make everythin' quite clear. You better report to Mr. Lane's office in the mornin', Eddie. He has apologies to make."

"How did you do it? What's it all about?" Amy and I demanded.

"When I tell you Neva Newell is a stage name, and that my honest-to-goodness moniker is Maida Lane, you won't be so puzzled," laughs the dancer. "You see, I went on the stage against the wishes of my proud family several years ago. Even my brothers, of whom Rodney is the most amiable, cast me off."

"I took my new name and carried on. Now, Rodney knew I was in town here; he knew I was Neva Newell. But he was too stubborn to come near me until—well, until he made his mistake about last night. Of course I had no idea he was outa college and a professional baseball manager."

"When you told me his name I knew at once why he had flown off the handle. Some of his suspicions realized, he thought. Silly thing! I bawled him out for that, believe me! He sneaked out after he heard it—not feelin' so hostile."

"You did convince him?" Amy cries eagerly. "I'm so glad! But you never told me your real name before, Neva!"

"Why should I?" The dancer's tone is a little bitter. "Oh, I had a real argument with that stubborn brother, but my shade of hair is hard to beat. I think Rodney will be more human after this—and more of a brother. You'll be back in the line-up, he says. He's sore at some other player—Siegel, I think. He changed his mind about suspendin' you, although it hurt him, I guess. He looked it."

"He told me he never changed his mind," I chirped, winking at Amy.

"It's a long Lane that has no turnin'," puns the sister to Specks, "and since I told him there's gonna be a Mrs. Adams he decided you'd need the money he fined you more than he does, too. With all this, you oughta play a pretty good game of baseball to-morrow, he told me, and knock a few home runs, whatever they are."

"I will!" I vow boastfully. "I'll knock enough to make Ruth jealous."

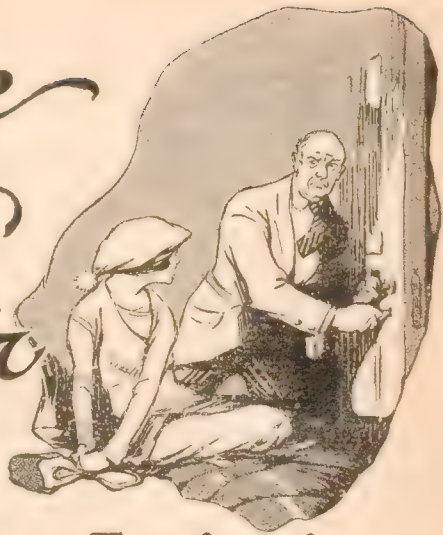
"Ruth who?" Amy suddenly cries. "And what right has she to be jealous?"

Believe me, I had to squawk fast to keep from bein' suspended a second time that day!

The Man-Hater

Part 2

By George Allan England



Author of "Cursed," "The Flying Legion," "Darkness and Dawn," "The Alibi," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ASHBEL INGRAHAM, cashier of the Dartford Savings Bank, has loaned his lifelong friend, John Pencoyd, ten thousand dollars of the bank's funds to save him from disgrace and failure. Three days before the loan is to be repaid Ingraham dies suddenly and his friend, taking advantage of this and his position of friend of the family, steals all the papers proving the loan and lets the dead cashier bear the burden of an apparent defalcation. The blow and the necessary restitution ruins the widow and quickly kills her, leaving the fourteen-year-old daughter, Carroll, destitute, but with an abiding distrust and hatred of men. She has never seen anything but the back of the false friend and does not know his name, so when six years later, she, now a stenographer in the New York law office of Blake and Campbell, is asked to take some special dictation from Pencoyd, now a millionaire, she does not recognize him. And as she is going under her mother's name of Norcross, he does not associate her with the daughter of the man he ruined.

In spite of an instinctive dislike and distrust she accepts the job and goes with Pencoyd to his palatial home, little guessing that the most vital hour of her life has struck. That things passing strange are imminently at hand.

CHAPTER V.

THE LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING.

INVITINGLY the elevator door stood open wide. John Pencoyd's gesture bade Carroll enter a real little bijou of a car, tapestried in red satin.

Carroll hesitated with a flash of suspicion. But had not Blake told her to go with this man? She gave Pencoyd an appraising look, and entered.

Pencoyd followed her, and closed the door. His strong fingers touched one of a row of enameled buttons. So noiselessly, so smoothly the car slid aloft that it seemed

not to move at all. The house, rather, seemed to drop about it. There were mirrors in the little elevator, and these presented many charming reflections of Carroll; but Pencoyd's eyes took no heed. Nothing, it seemed, would move this man from his calm, repressed coldness.

Now the car stopped. The door, untouched by any hand, slid open.

"Pardon me," said the master of the house, and preceded her.

Carroll followed him along a somewhat dim hall, paneled in darkly polished wood. She got fleeting impressions of heavy rugs, of paintings in gold frames. An open door

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 4.

revealed a bedchamber. Carroll realized she was not at all familiar with such bedchambers. Circassian walnut furniture, Daghestan rugs, and—in an inner room—the glimpse of a Pompeiian bathing-pool sunk in a floor of cream-hued marble; all these, frankly, lay above and beyond her ranges of experience.

The bedchamber troubled Carroll. That momentary glance seemed such a personal, intimate view into the life of some man, unknown; a young man, no doubt—as the sporting-prints, the golf-sticks in a corner seemed to prove. Carroll was used to seeing much at one glance. This room set her wondering. Had Pencoyd, then, a son? And if so, what manner of person might he be? Carroll felt already that he must be like Pencoyd, senior, and that she disliked them both very heartily.

Her wonder about the young man had barely time to flicker into consciousness before other impressions overlaid and stifled it. The hallway ended at a door that ushered her, with Pencoyd, into a kind of officelike library at the front of the house.

Clear April sunshine lighted this room most cheerily, flooding in through tall windows slashed up and down by wrought-iron mullions. There were books a-plenty, in unit cases; filing-cabinets; an oak typewriter-table with the new machine all installed; a broad table on which stood writing things, wire baskets and a phone. Carroll saw a wall safe, too. Yes, this looked like business.

The broad fireplace with the brisk fire, the oak mantel carved in arabesques, the gold candelabra along the walls—14 K, they really were—the Louis Quatorze clock, swung the impression back again toward home things. The room looked rather a jumble, thought the girl; neither home, library nor office, but a little of all three. The work-room, obviously, of a busy and rich man, who loved results.

"Only, if this were mine," thought she, "I'd introduce some radical changes."

If it were hers! Foolish Cinderella dream, but easy, after the ride up-town in the enchanted chariot!

Carroll took off her coat and hat, and laid them on a puffy leather divan that

just lolled at one with invitations to laziness. She had already, in the elevator and the hall, peeled off her gloves and stuffed them into her coat-pocket, showing her hands slim, white, and strong; hands that bore only a single ring, a little silver band with a plain blue stone. This ring, given her by her father, never left her finger, and always reminded her of him.

Pencoyd was studying her. He nodded, well pleased. Here was businesslike energy right enough.

"You understand, of course," said he, "we must have absolute discretion about anything written here."

"Yes."

"No publicity."

"There won't be any."

"Good!" He touched a button. "We'll get to work at once."

Carroll sat down at the table, took a stenographic note-book, brand new, that lay there, and chose a sharp pencil from the little rack of the ink-well. Pencoyd, meantime, had opened a filing-cabinet and was taking out many papers.

While he was thus engaged, his house-keeper entered the library, in answer to his summons. Carroll saw a pale, slender, oldish woman with sad eyes; with black clothing touched by white at throat and wrists; with an air of deep reserve, as if she had long ago retreated into her own ego for refuge from a world both hard and bitter.

Pencoyd made brief presentation, with a courtesy that allowed neither woman to feel herself an employee. He gave the impression of being honored by their presence in his library. His smile, for all its reserve, looked cordial. This man seemed capable of facing any situation with an appearance of convincing sincerity; just as he had seemed sincere when promising Ashbel Ingraham the payment would be made; just as he had seemed sincere when regretting to the widow that he could do nothing, absolutely nothing, to help her in her hour of deadly need and peril.

"Lunch at once, please," he requested. "In the east room." He spoke quietly. A troubled look came over him. "By the way, Mrs. Mackenzie," he added, "has Lawrence come home yet?"

"Not yet, Mr. Pencoyd."

"Well—all right."

The Scotswoman departed. Pencoyd sat down, across the table from Carroll, and began looking over his papers. But his mind seemed afield. He appeared to feel vexation, worry, now, in spite of all his strength.

The girl waited patiently. And as she waited she studied this man. Something in his voice once more seemed stirring buried memories that had long lain in the dust-heaps of oblivion. Something in those rasping intonations seemed to move and quicken recollections. Where had she heard a voice like that before? Where had she seen, in connection with it, thick neck and shoulders such as these?

"Take this, please, Miss Norcross!"

Pencoyd's direction banished the half-nebulous whirl of half-recollection now beginning to form a blur of something that reached out into the past. And Carroll, swiftly setting to work, thought no more of anything save her notes.

Sunlight, falling between the tall mul- lions, spared no detail of Pencoyd's getting on in age. He had retrograded a good deal, personally, since that day in the old-fashioned Ingraham library. His fortunes must have expanded a hundred, a thousand fold; but money had not been able to hide the fact that he had lived too high and that he had worried more than was good for him about something. The scar-tissue left where wounds on his conscience had healed, leaving that conscience now insensible, had marked its outward reflexes on him. One's soul cannot atrophy without its hardness stiffening the face.

His mind, however, had grown more acute, prehensile, incisive than six years before.

The matters in hand he dictated with admirable clarity, hesitating not, making few changes in the descriptions of properties and in the prospectus he was writing. This man evidently knew his material and what he wanted. From time to time he referred to folders, clippings, letters, contracts, deeds, finding his material quickly, handling it well.

"Efficiency!" thought Carroll. Much as she disliked this person and was troubled

by some vagrant half-shreds of unpleasant memory that seemed to cling about him, she could not help admiring him. Men like this, she realized, make the world go round—though if you get in the way of their machinery—

Thus the work went on. And always Carroll's flying pencil recorded every word with the unvarying accuracy of mechanism. The girl was on her mettle. Whatever best lay within her, that best she would give.

At one o'clock, lunch. An impeccable butler and maid announced and served it in the east room, as ordered. The east room turned out to be on the top floor of the house, via the bijou of an elevator. The view out over the park, happy with sunshine that misted the trees in feather-veils of primaveral green, distracted Carroll's mind from the disagreeable necessity of eating with this cold-eyed, silent man.

Three places were laid on the round table of dull teak. But one place remained vacant. Carroll knew this place was Lawrence's. Her interest was beginning to find itself a bit intrigued by this invisible young man.

"How old is Lawrence?" she wondered. "And what kind of a chap may he be? And why should Pencoyd be so uneasy about him?" For uneasy he obviously was, though he said nothing. His eyes, varnished as they were, could not quite hide their anxiety, almost their fear, as they slid now and then to that empty place. Carroll felt that she would rather like to see this Lawrence, who slept in Circassian walnut, and bathed in Pompeian pools.

She knew many types of men, and rather thoroughly despised them all as weak, vain, and crude. This might be a new type, with even more weakness, vanity, crudity than the others. If so, he might be worth looking over, labeling, putting on a shelf in her Cynic's Museum.

Presently Carroll dismissed Lawrence Pencoyd from her thoughts, and began studying the east room.

"This is good," thought she. "This is better than the library. I could improve it a little, but not much, even if I were mistress of this house." Carroll did not lack self-confidence. No shrinking violet,

she. "Yes, I think this room is rather good."

And then she fell a-dreaming for a moment about the home she had lost. About how, had not some unknown Judas ruined her father, she, too, might have by now had pretty things like these. Rather foolish dreamings, perhaps, but very human.

The lacey drawnwork centerpiece, the Seiji bowl of white pebbles with the tall Canton lilies, the cut-glass, the silver, all gave a restful impression, harmonious and calm. Bouillon in cups, lamb-chops, a fruit-salad, sherbet—it satisfied, yet did not cloy. She had expected, perhaps, a full-orchestral lunch. This was just an aria. Not an epic, but an Austin Dobson rondeau of a lunch. Carroll enjoyed the Satsuma-ware, the Kabul silk rugs, the long yellow curtains sheer and fine. She loved everything in this lovable room, except John Pencoyd and the empty chair that reminded her of Lawrence.

And again the feeling came upon her that these environments were hers by right of appreciation. Thus should she live! Even through all the realization that this was but a temporary, Cinderella glimpse of fairyland, she could—as when a child—"play pretend." She could make believe it was all hers, forever and a day.

Remember, please, Carroll was only twenty. At twenty miracles seem not so very hard, after all.

It was two o'clock when Pencoyd returned to work with the girl. As her pencil went on catching his words and affixing them to the red lines of her note-book, she got a general comprehension of what was planned. Pencoyd seemed organizing a new company, with a lot of properties involved. A very exclusive company, to have only a score or so of stockholders.

There was a dash of oil in it, some bond-broking and something about mortgages. Foreclosures and the buying-up of commercial paper were to play a prominent rôle. Carroll thought it looked like a money-grabbing proposition, to be put through by men who didn't mind a bit of a gamble and who would sooner than not force into bankruptcy a chap that, with a little leniency and time, might weather through.

Half mechanically, Carroll took down everything. To her, all this possessed no significance. Dealings such as these were, after all, only such as might have been expected from a man of Pencoyd's type.

Then came a sheaf of letters, to prospective shareholders, all personal friends of this hard man. And then the last letter of all, the letter that climaxed everything. The letter that in a moment of time flung wide the gates of revelation. The letter that was to change all the currents of the girl's life. The letter that stripped away all safeguards from John Pencoyd, and—but you shall see the letter for yourselves, and understand.

This letter, potent with such possibilities in so many lives, dropped as casually from the lips of John Pencoyd as if it had been only a note asking a friend to dinner. Now read it:

ALBERT H. SUTTON,
187 Strathmore Road,
Brighton, Mass.

MY DEAR ALBERT:

Matters are progressing. We shall organize in a few days. The charter is going through, all right, under the New Jersey laws. I have acquired one hundred and fifteen acres of oil land near Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, and as I will explain when I see you, this will cover all other operations. Success seems assured.

He paused, to gather his thoughts. Carroll, pencil ready, did not even glance up. Her thoughts clung only half to the letter. She was getting a little tired of this shorthand work, and felt anxious to begin transcribing on the new machine. Thus she waited. Presently Pencoyd went on:

"The possibilities of this commercial paper and foreclosure business seem unlimited. Everything can be done in a strictly legal manner. Our beginnings may seem small, but I know the potentialities of a small beginning, if working along right lines. My own beginning was small enough, as you know, six years back. I admit fortune favored me. But one lucky stroke put me on the right track, then, and it can do as much now for all of us."

Carroll, frowning, paused a moment. "Six years back—one lucky stroke," echoed in her brain. It chimed in with a vaguely persistent memory of a voice that had

sounded something like John Pencoyd's; of shoulders and a thick neck something like his. Where—what—who—

"Well," asked Pencoyd, "have you got all that?"

"Yes."

He had arisen, and was pacing the floor, hands behind him. Men and animals in cages always do that; and so, commonly, do men engage in hard thinking. What may the connection be? Perhaps it is the spirit that seeks escape through bonds, unconsciously expressing itself in physical action.

"Got it, eh?" he repeated. "All right then. Please go on."

Her eyes lowered from his face, where they had been resting as he had come toward her. Once more her pencil began speeding along the thin red lines of this man's destiny and her own:

"All our operations will be carried on in a strictly legal manner. Illegality does not pay. Only stupid men resort to it. We can work along perfectly legal lines. We can also maintain entire anonymity. Our names will not be brought into question. I learned a lesson at the beginning of my success, when chance put into my hands the money which fortunate investments have since so largely increased. A lesson that I have never forgotten. And that is personalities do not matter. The claims of friendship must never interfere with business.

"We hear far too much twaddle about widows and orphans. This is to be a pure matter of business, without sentiment of any kind, and—"

Carroll's pencil went *snap* as her hand gave an involuntary jerk. She had grown suddenly very pale.

"Widows and orphans! Widows and orphans!" The phrase seemed hammering in her brain. And what was all this about friendship not weighing in the balance with business? And about that sudden beginning of success six years ago?

"Well?" demanded Pencoyd, vexed at the interruption.

"Wait a minute—please," begged Carroll. "I—I've broken my pencil."

He stood there looking at her a moment, then turned toward the window, annoyed. He began tapping his foot on the polished floor. His hands were still clasped behind

him; and now he began snapping his fingers, his thick, strong fingers. The heavy droop of his shoulders, the massive turn of his neck—Carroll remembered them. Yes, she remembered now!

They stood out clearly silhouetted against the window. There had been another window, years ago. That window—the library—her father—the stranger there—

"God!" she whispered, understanding all. Everything got black, a second. She thought she was going to faint.

But she did not faint. Her hands gripped the edge of the table; they held her up. She became conscious that the man had turned and was peering curiously at her. She heard his voice, seemingly very far off:

"Well, Miss Norcross, what is it?"

"My pencil," was all she could say, weakly enough.

He came to the table, and handed her another pencil from the ink-well. His irritation seemed to have melted in anxiety.

"You look a bit done up," said he with what seemed genuine sympathy. "Are you ill?"

"No, just a little dizzy. It's close in here—isn't it? Might I have a—drink of water?"

Pencoyd rang for Mrs. Mackenzie, and sat down—sat down there on the opposite side of the table from Carroll, not four feet away; almost within arm's-reach of Carroll now—of Carroll who at last understood. She set her teeth into her lip, to keep from screaming.

"It's all right," said he, encouragingly, as he picked up a contract bound in stiff blue paper, and fell to looking it over. "It's quite all right." His glance looked friendly. "Pardon me if I seemed annoyed at the interruption. It was only because I dislike having a train of thought broken in on. But we can wait. This is the last letter. I'm sorry if I've driven you a bit too hard."

"I'll be all right in a minute or two, thank you."

Silence fell between them. Carroll sat with lowered eyes, not wanting, nor even daring, to look up again. She needed no more observation. At last she understood.

And in this supreme crisis of the girl's

soul, John Pencoyd sat there, still, just across the table, his varnished eyes fixed on the contract—that somehow now seemed to fill Carroll with horrible aversion.

That aversion to the man and all his works, that loathing, detestation, hate, burned in her eyes as she sat there watching him. Still he remained unconscious of her gaze. He looked gross, heavy, overfed and overladen with good conceits of himself; but through it all his infernally keen intelligence betrayed itself in those cold eyes, those impersonal, prehensile eyes.

Thus the two sat there, four feet apart in lineal measurement, universes apart in the essence of reality. And Carroll felt the branding-irons of hate searing a name deep into her soul—the name *John Pencoyd*.

Suddenly Mrs. Mackenzie entered, like a quiet Scotch wraith, orthodoxly proper in her sad wraith-hood. Pencoyd ordered water, which she fetched in cut-glass on a little silver tray with a linen doily, all very properly. The old Scotswoman eyed the girl and Pencoyd sharply, penetrantly, but said nothing.

Pencoyd looked up while Carroll drank and drank again, thirstily, with the thirst of a fevered and a branded soul.

She caught a pitying look of the old woman's eye, and felt a thrill of fellow sympathy. Mrs. Mackenzie, too, had suffered here. Mrs. Mackenzie understood. Carroll wanted to take her by the hand, draw her close—but, no! No, that would not have done any good. This was to be a lone fight. It must be that. All by herself she must go through.

Pencoyd glanced up.

"By the way, Mrs. Mackenzie, has—"

"Not yet, sir. When he comes in, shall I tell you?"

"If I'm here, yes."

Mrs. Mackenzie nodded, and withdrew.

"I'm all right now, Mr. Pencoyd," spoke up Carroll. "I'm sorry to have wasted your time. I can go on now."

"Quite able to? I don't want to rush you." He spoke kindly. Obviously he liked this girl, so neat, businesslike, efficient. "I can use her again some time," he was thinking. "If I treat her right, she may become invaluable to me."

"I'm quite ready," she answered. She glanced at her notes. You were saying, 'We hear far too much twaddle about widows and orphans. This is to be a pure matter of business, without sentiment of any kind, and—'"

"Yes, yes. Well, let's see—"

He paused a moment more, then in that unpleasant and creaking voice continued:

"—without sentiment of any kind, and conducted in a wholly impersonal manner.

"With proper handling, it can be made most profitable. In a short time those who join me in this enterprise should realize large returns. I advise you to come in. A personal interview at this time would undoubtedly be useful, and I hope you will find it convenient to come over from Boston, if only for a day or two. Will you let me hear from you regarding the whole matter?"

"Trusting that it may strike you favorably, and with best personal wishes, I am as ever,

Yours sincerely,

CHAPTER VI.

CARROLL'S GAMBIT.

WITH the damning letter all recorded, ready for transcription and signature, Carroll sat quite still for a moment at the table. Above all, she realized, she must hold the whip-hand over herself. She must not lose control of herself or of the situation.

Everything seemed floating in a kind of gray mist. Through this mist, Carroll could still see the heavy-shouldered, thick-necked figure of John Pencoyd just as he had been that terrible night, six years ago. And horrible memories of pain possessed her soul.

The girl's hand fell limp as she wrote the last word. All strength faded out of her. She was conscious of a burning, through all the confusion of her spirit. What might it be? Ah, now she knew. Now she understood. This was the branding-iron of her hate.

Blood rushed to her brain. She felt her pulsés hammering, and struggled for breath. But Pencoyd sensed nothing. He was paying no attention to this mere employee as he sat there looking over his best contract. On the very edges of disaster, he still was

building empires of greater wealth out of such stuff as bubbles are made of.

Carroll's brain cleared a little. She fought off the panting eagerness that possessed her to do something swift and dramatic; to declare herself, denounce this Judas, revile and threaten him. For once in her life of coldly calculated self-restraint, she knew the redness of passion. Her hatred of men, till now in a way theoretical, flared up like powder licked by flame. It became real, concrete centered on a tangible object. But no—it took no outward form. No sign of it appeared.

John Pencoyd perceived nothing of it, because Carroll understood he must not be allowed to perceive anything. A terrible imperative of concealment gripped her soul.

For Carroll knew a supreme purpose must dominate every lesser purpose. She must get and keep proof of all this traitor's plans, and snare him past escape. Even in this terrible moment of understanding her will conquered her emotions. From infinitely far, voices seemed echoing to her.

She seemed to hear her mother's voice:

"It was a man we thought a friend who ruined your father and destroyed our home!"

Then came Aunt Joe's:

"Carroll, you watch out for men, you be afeared o' men! Remember what a man done to your father an' mother, an' to me!"

Came a third voice. But this she did not recognize, for it was a voice she had never yet heard—the voice of her own soul, now called to utterance by this stern crisis:

"Be very calm and very strong. Do not betray your father and your mother. They look to you for justice. You must win justice for them; you alone, unaided. The larger issues demand silence. Be strong; be calm—and wait!"

All at once, as the whirling mists cleared a little from before her eyes, she perceived that Pencoyd was looking at her. A little dawning curiosity was visible in his hard eyes; and curiosity now spelled deadly peril to her plans and all her hot ambitions. The man's thick brows, she saw, were drawn down in a kind of inquisitive squint. A vague wonder was transpiring from that heavy, smug, pitiless face.

Carroll mastered herself completely. She forced herself to speak.

"Is that all, Mr. Pencoyd?" asked she, holding her voice steady.

"Yes, that's all. You'll write out your notes at once? I'm anxious to have everything done to-day." A pause. Then, "You're not ill, I hope?"

He spoke solicitously. Carroll could have struck him dead for that unwanted kindness.

"No, I'm all right," she answered, wondering if the hate in her soul were trembling in her voice. "I'm only a little tired. That's all."

"You'll be quite able to get all the letters out this afternoon?"

Carroll laughed strangely.

"Every letter shall be written and mailed before I go home!"

"Very good," Pencoyd nodded. Now that his part of the work was done he seemed a little relieved, a bit expansive. His interest in Carroll appeared genuine. The man even smiled. "I like the way you talk, Miss Norcross. If all employees were like you business would be robbed of much of its complication."

"Yes?" Her eyes gleamed darkly; and color once more began to undertone the pallor of her skin. "Maybe you're right, Mr. Pencoyd. Maybe it *would* lose some of its—complication." Her intonation of the last word might have told him volumes, but it told him nothing. How could he know?

Pencoyd got up and breathed deeply.

"I shall have to leave you for a while," said he. "What do your busy fingers need now, my dear?"

She smiled up at him betrayingly.

"They need plenty of paper and carbons and copy-papers and envelopes," she answered. The girl seemed open and friendly. She had become fully mistress of herself and of the situation. Cats playing with mice, surely doomed, evince quite parallel confidence.

"And then?" asked Pencoyd.

"Then I shall need to be let alone for a couple of hours. After that, your signature, please, and the mail-box on the corner."

Pencoyd smiled, pleased with this un-

usual type of girl. "Yes, I could surely use her," he was thinking. "Here's a gem. I must outbid Blake, and put her brains to work for me!"

He walked over to the typewriter-desk. His large, strong hand touched a couple of drawers.

"You'll find ample supplies here, my dear," said he. Carroll shuddered. "Make yourself perfectly at home."

"I will, thank you."

"If you want anything, ring for Mrs. Mackenzie."

"Yes." She paused. Then, "Do you know, Mr. Pencoyd—"

"Well?" He seemed quite willing to chat a little. Rarely had John Pencoyd, the silent, ever unbent so far as now. (But then, rarely had John Pencoyd ever spoken with a girl of this beauty, joined with this one's ready tongue.) "Well, what were you going to ask?"

"Do you know," she repeated, her eyes inscrutable, "somehow I *do* feel at home here. As if I belonged here, you know. As if—odd idea, isn't it?—as if this house and everything in it were really mine, or were going to be. As if—"

Pencoyd laughed. It was a dry, creaking kind of laugh; but a laugh it indubitably was. Few persons had ever heard one from him. (But, then, few persons had ever amused him as this girl did.)

"You're an odd combination, Miss Norcross," he analyzed.

"Yes?"

"A mixture of hard, practical, common sense, and of imaginative fancies. Practical people who are also dreamers are very rare. People with common sense, who also possess vision, are apt to be highly valuable. What success I have, I owe to the fact that I am practical, and that I can also dream—dream of greater things, of vaster achievements. Those who can dream and can make their dreams come true—the world belongs to such. And you, yes, you are a dreamer."

"I admit that," she answered, stabbing at the blotting-pad with her pencil. Thus doing, she could avoid his eyes. She dared not yet look into them steadily lest he should read her thoughts. "I *am* some-

thing of a dreamer. Perhaps I haven't ever yet succeeded in making my dreams come true, but I think—I know—I can! I've got one dream, this minute, that must come true. That will come true! Because I'm going to make it!"

"Yes?" smiled Pencoyd, indulgently, not unkindly. This girl did, truly, interest him very greatly indeed. With her at his right hand, what might he not accomplish? Yes, he must seriously give thought to the matter of luring her away from Blake and Campbell by offers of higher wages and easier working conditions. Here was a prize by no means to be overlooked!

"Yes?" he repeated. "You must come of a race of—what shall I say?—of intellectuals. Writers, perhaps, or artistic people, or—"

She glanced up at him briefly—as she had smiled—giving him no time to read her. She felt something very odd about the situation—felt full power over this man, yet feared to lose it. Some incautious word, some chance look, even some intuition of Pencoyd's alert brain, might such not utterly destroy her hopes? You, who have hooked a game fish but not yet brought it to the landing-net, you understand.

She answered:

"Well, my mother once had some literary ambitions and talent as a young woman. My father was a—business man. He was a—merchant in the South."

"That accounts for your two chief characteristics, Miss Norcross. Well"—and he glanced at the Louis Quatorze clock—"I must be going now. The letters and everything will be done—"

"By five o'clock."

"I'll be here at five, sharp."

"I'll be ready for you."

She said nothing more, but took her note-book, went over to the typewriter-desk and sat down there. Her face had gone pale again, but the light in her eyes was no pale light. It had fighting color that burned.

Something of that light seemed also to be shining through the ivory skin, like a kind of aura that bespoke great purposes. The girl's face, clouded with its halo of dark hair, seemed withdrawn behind veils

of aloofness. There was consecration to high duty even in such simple trifles as preparing the materials for the transcribing of John Pencoyd's documents and letters.

The weapons in her arsenal were now, by fate and her own sure hand and brain, to be forged to perfect instruments of justice.

Still Pencoyd did not go.

"Everything all right?" asked he, a little uneasily. Did some hint of peril, perhaps, half-finger at that keenly cold and watchful brain? Did some prescience almost whisper: "Look out?"

He added: "Anything more you need, Miss Norcross?"

"Nothing, thank you." Already she was putting paper into the machine—two sheets, with a carbon between. "You want a copy of everything, Mr. Pencoyd?"

"Yes, of course. Well, if there's nothing more—"

She made no answer. In some subtle way it seemed almost as if she were dismissing him. He peered at her a moment, puzzled and with a kind of intangible wonderment. Then he was gone.

Carroll did not look after him, this man who had ruined her father, killed her mother, robbed herself of home and friends and youth itself—this Judas who had made life for her a harsh, toilsome, lonely, bitter thing. Her face, as she sat there at the machine which had now become her means of justice, mirrored a calm and perfect impassivity.

Carroll's pulses had gone back to normal. She felt a sort of cold, enduring resolution, now; an implacable force, never to weaken or be turned aside till it should have reached its goal.

"Thank God, he's gone!" thought Carroll. "He's gone, and I can have free rein with all this business!"

Her first move, exultant with a kind of hate that gloried in its savagery and bitterness, that triumphed in its self-control which had hidden the truth and masked everything beneath light commonplaces, was to prepare to take two copies of each transcript. She put in another carbon and copy-sheet; then set immediately to work.

She transcribed her notes with painstaking

care, omitting no syllable, adding none, making a perfect copy of everything John Pencoyd had said. As she worked, she smiled. Strange, bitter-sweet happiness lay in that smile.

One by one she wrote out all the letters and documents, always making one copy for Pencoyd, one for herself. The originals and first copies she laid on the broad table, in two neat piles. The second copies she slid into a drawer of the desk, and each time laid a few blank sheets over them, for safeguard. You could see that Carroll was working along a well-considered line and taking no chances.

Without rest she labored nearly two hours. The sunlight crept broadly over the Persian rugs and up the dark-paneled walls. The fire burned down in the grate. A log broke, flinging out sheaves of sparks. Still Carroll did not pause. She hurried not, but in her work there lay a kind of implacable, unwearying determination.

An invincible purpose drove her to press steadily along with this task supreme; to be sure that five o'clock should find all the documents and letters ready for Pencoyd, all her own copies safely in her keeping.

Carroll already had formed a very clear notion of what manner of business Pencoyd was planning; and she hoped, she believed she possessed data enough, now, not only to checkmate that business but also to start prosecutions that might land him behind bars—once he should have really carried out his plans. This was probably to be a waiting game.

Yes, her first thought was prison for this despoiler of her family, this wrecker of her home. The larger plan, soon to develop, had not yet dawned on her. All she now thought of was revenge, and a waiting game.

"And I can wait," thought the girl. "I've already waited six years. Six weeks more, or six months, won't be very hard!"

Pencoyd's idea, in brief, seemed to be this: under guise of legitimate oil-development, to get a charter enabling the new company to undertake practically any line of business. The principal line appeared to be that of buying up commercial paper and forcing bankruptcies. There was also

a feature of oil-stock exploitation that might, if exposed by her, result in legal complications. And always in the background lay John Pencoyd's original crime.

Yes, Carroll remembered that! She remembered that the man who had ruined her father would, himself, have gone to prison only for her father's help. She could investigate that crime; she could find out about it, somehow, somewhere, and thus hold him in the hollow of her hand. She knew he had received stolen money from her father; he had been a party to that crime. This, too, could be held over him. As she worked, she thought; and as she thought, she smiled.

"I think, John Pencoyd," she murmured, "I'll just give you plenty of rope and a good high tree, and watch results!"

So, on and on, steadily, relentlessly, she toiled. Efficiency, indeed, Pencoyd would have called it, had he been there to see. Efficiency, driven by hate, which is the strongest of all human motives save only one. That other, stronger, is love. But of love Carroll knew nothing, save love of self and love of the memories that clung about the little cemetery lying under the April afternoon sun in far-off Dartford.

As Carroll worked, once in a while she glanced at the clock on the mantel. Her deep and dark eyes were satisfied. The task was going on well. The thing that had to be done would be done in time—unless some interruption should have the evil fortune to intrude.

The clock goldenly rang its little set of chimes. Four o'clock. Carroll's flying fingers paused a moment, then sped on. But the distraction she had feared was already at hand

CHAPTER VII.

"NOBODY KNOWS! NOBODY CARES!"

A FOOTSTEP jarred the silence of the hall that led into the library. It crossed the threshold. Carroll looked round, and found her eyes meeting the questioning look of young Lawrence Pencoyd.

For a moment they said nothing, but

appraised each other. Carroll was thinking:

"So this is the son of the Judas who betrayed my father!"

She felt that she hated him—or at any rate, that she should hate him. Hate seemed obligatory. She perfectly well understood that here, in this visible presence, stood the concrete expression of something that her own life-tragedy had in large measure made real. The fortune that had made this young man possible, as he now stood there before her, had sprung from the crucifixion of her father. Carroll's hands, inert on the keyboard, clenched to fists. She felt the pressure of the little silver ring her father had given her; and it seemed as if that father had reached out from beyond the grave and touched her hand, and said to her:

"Do not forget!"

So for that silent moment this young woman and this young man looked at each other with mutual appraisal. Lawrence's questioning eyes were observing the girl as we have seen her. He beheld a cool, efficient figure of womanhood in a plain linen blouse and plaid skirt; a self-contained figure, alert, watchful, with dark eyes that saw much.

"Who's this?" wondered Lawrence. "I didn't know the governor had got a secretary!" He felt glad, however, that the governor *had* got a secretary. Devilish lonely place, this big house was, with only the governor and old Mrs. Mackenzie and noiseless automata of servants creeping about. Not in some time had Lawrence felt more pleased.

"By Jove, she's a beauty!" thought he. At once he felt drawn toward this girl, who surely depended on no extraneous finery for her charm. He perceived something in her, different from anything he had ever quite chanced upon before. Somehow she reminded him of one of Rodin's "Caryatides"—she seemed, like them, beautiful because of strength, because of burdens that have to be and can be borne; because of a certain aloofness from the world.

Let us give Lawrence credit. Had this girl been decked in war-paint, with huge puffs over the ears, a whitened nose, low-

cut waist and a wad of gum, he would have looked at her a moment, raised his eyebrows, turned and gone out. Weaknesses he had, as we shall see; but girls like that were not among them. Which was well.

He liked this one for being quite another sort. In just his present mood, he needed that other sort. He needed strength and impersonality. And Carroll seemed to have both. She seemed to be almost an abstraction of those qualities, rather than just a girl of warm and living emotions, with moods, joys, sorrows, whimsies, passions. Somehow, to his confused and troubled eyes, she suddenly dawned on him as a personification of power, of resource, of calm.

"By Jove, a beauty!" But the thought held nothing of the personal. It was the tribute, rather, of a soul adrift, inchoate, inarticulate; a tribute offered to a being calm and wise.

And Carroll, on her side—what of Carroll?

Yes, she too was making due appraisal. Not all her haste to get her copying done, nor yet all her aversion to the race of Pencoyd, could overcome her desire to behold this young man about whom her enemy had seemed so much disturbed. That which possessed importance for him, must also possess it for her.

She beheld a tall fellow, perhaps of four and twenty, with brown hair that waved a little in spite of being brushed severely backward from a good forehead. The color of his eyes she could not make out, but they looked dark. Worried, tired, puzzled they certainly were; and worse than all, purposeless.

His mouth, she saw, appeared a little weak; but still it was a good deal better than John Pencoyd's. His chin was well carved out; his nose outlined itself straight and thoroughbred. The features all were right enough, but their expression showed a weariness, an anxiety that set one speculating as to causations.

Most notable of everything in that face one read a kind of emptiness, something futile, something profoundly sad.

Carroll recognized him as a spender and a loafer—on money won from her father's

downfall as a beginning—and grew bitter with scorn of him. Then a feeling of strong aversion, almost of hate, followed, as from froths over the crest of surf. With that hate possessing her, she turned back to her work—the work which, so she planned, was to bear disastrous fruit not only to John Pencoyd, but also to this scion of the detested stock.

Young Pencoyd, a trifle at a loss, advanced into the library. He stopped again, and for a moment stood there observing Carroll's dexterously flying fingers. His left hand held a leather cap; his body was girt in a leather coat, spotted and streaked with grease and mud. On his cheek, too, a blot of mud, roughly smeared away, had left its trace. That cheek was weather-browned, but pale beneath the tan. The cheek-bone showed too plainly. The thumb and forefinger of the right hand were saffron with cigarette smoke.

Young Pencoyd coughed dryly, hesitated, came nearer.

"Beg pardon," he ventured, "but is the governor anywhere round? I mean, you—you haven't seen him recently, have you?"

"Yes. He went out about an hour and a half ago."

Carroll's slim, strong hands rested on the keyboard. She looked half-round at Lawrence. Her chin was tilted a little. Her eyes looked irreconcilable, with underlights of misprizal and detestation.

"Oh, he's gone, eh?"

"Yes, he's gone."

"That's bad! So am I—if I don't connect with him pretty soon!" He sighed, and smiled dolefully. "They wouldn't tell me anything, down-stairs."

He came a little closer. His eyes troubled her a little. She was unused to having young men look at her, fixedly and with obvious admiration. In all her lonely life few men had come close to her at all—none but old Blake and his partner, Campbell; and so far as really being men was concerned, *they* might as well have been the graven images on Easter Island.

She tried to stiffen her resentment against Lawrence, but there lay a kind of sad whimsicality in his smile, a sort of half-humorous, quizzical expression, that

for the moment half made her forget she had to hate him.

"They wouldn't tell me anything, downstairs," said he. "That's the deuce of having servants. They boss the whole shop, really. A chap can't take a free breath. Richards wouldn't tell, or Mackenzie, or anybody. I guess the governor isn't keen on my knowing where he is. He didn't say where he was going?"

"No."

"Oh, all right. When 'll he be back?"

She only shrugged her shoulders. Her business with John Pencoyd, at five o'clock, was not such that she intended having Lawrence interfere for any reasons of his own.

Then an idea struck her. Perhaps she could use this fellow. Perhaps she might find out a thing or two that, in the impending struggle, might come handily to her arsenal.

"You really need to see him?" asked she, and forced a little smile.

The ready warmth with which he smiled back at her was almost pathetic. Perhaps in months this boy had had no smile given him that he had not bought and paid for.

"I'd really like to," he answered.

"Some business matter, perhaps?" she insinuated. "You know, I'm doing a lot of work for Mr. Pencoyd. Perhaps it might be something connected with—"

He interrupted her. "No; I wouldn't butt in while the governor's not here."

She felt her cheek burn a little, with the implied rebuke. Against her own wish and instinct, she sensed a tiny flicker of appreciation. Puzzled though young Lawrence obviously was, and worried and more than a bit afraid of something—no doubt in immediate need of John Pencoyd to get him out of some stupid, wasteful complication—still he seemed to have the rudiments of a backbone. Carroll felt ashamed of herself. No; whatever might befall, she would not use such weapons. She would not attack Pencoyd through Lawrence. She would meet him face to face, in open battle, or not at all.

Carroll turned back to the machine. Again the deft fingers began their flight over the talking keys.

Lawrence smiled again, with an odd little pucker to his brows. He wanted to talk to this girl, who didn't want to talk to him. That was quite obvious. Let us be entirely fair with the boy. There was nothing really forward in his attitude—nothing of the flirtatious sort. Nor did he presume on the girl's situation as John Pencoyd's employee, and in his house, to force himself. He seemed, in fact, a little diffident. Of the two, he looked the more embarrassed.

Lawrence walked over to the fireplace and kicked back into the ashes a glowing ember too far out on the Delft tiles. Then he turned and looked at Carroll, who now gave no sign of noticing him any more.

All at once the harsh, flattening-and-sharping drone of a springtide hand-organ drifted up from the street. Manfully it labored with "There's a Long, Long Trail." Now and then it struck a right note, haphazard, in a kind of I-don't-care-if-I-do manner. Lawrence smiled again, walked to the tall-mullioned window and looked out. Then he laughed, boyishly.

"You would hardly expect to see *that*, up here by the park, eh?" asked he, speaking almost as if to himself.

Carroll looked up. You could see the interest in her eyes, but her lips formed no word.

"Makes me think of when I was a kid, back in—but never mind where," said Lawrence. "Did hand-organs used to come down the street in the spring, and sort of open up your heart, when the first leaves were just hazing the horse-chestnuts and maples with green? Did they do that, in *your* town, too?"

Carroll made no answer. Her town! Her childhood! Oh, God, that he—this man of the race of Pencoyd—should have spoken to her of childhood and of home!

He seemed not to notice her silence. His whole air had changed. Something winningly boyish, careless, happy, had replaced the tired and worried look. Something that seemed to go out to the music, crude though it was; something that seemed to want to rove, to be in and of the springtime, to free itself of the bonds and burdens of fortune, and to seek the open road. All at once he laughed.

The laugh checked itself, as he looked out the window. He grew suddenly serious again. His eyes became sad.

"That Guinea," said he; "that confounded Guinea's got a monkey on a string. He's pulling him about too strong. And those kids—he's letting those kids pester the little fellow. I don't like *that*!"

He unlatched a window, swung it wide, tossed out a quarter and called down something in Italian. Carroll's eyes widened a bit. Again she felt the tug of respect, involuntarily—nay, against all the dictates of her will.

"Poor little beggar!" commiserated Lawrence. "On a string, eh? I know how *that* feels—only too well! Not to be free—oh, not to be free—"

He remained there a moment, looking out. Then he closed the window, and faced round at her again. She was not writing, now, but sat there watching him, trying hard to hate him—as she should—and rather completely failing.

The hand-organ, now a little farther down the street, started another tune—"Nobody Knows, and Nobody Seems to Care." Throatily, with bizarre discords, the music won its way, banal and of the people, up into that sheltered room of wealth. A scent of spring, that had come through the opened window, drifted to Carroll. Something like a warm benediction of that soft April evening seemed to rest a moment on her brow.

The form of Lawrence, outlined against the window, still stood there. Carroll had seen Pencoyd, Sr., standing in the same place, at the moment she had fully recognized him. The boy—how different he looked, slim though strong, clean moulded, tenderly whimsical. Alert he was, like the older man; but with what vast differences!

She remained sitting there, looking at him. He returned the look. He was not smiling, now.

"Nobody Knows, and Nobody Seems to Care!" the hand-organ proclaimed. "Nobody Knows! Nobody Cares!"

Lawrence thrust both hands deep into the pockets of his leather jacket, and laughed oddly.

"Indulging in personalities now, that

organ is!" said he, his voice strange. "What's worse, nobody has *ever* known! Nobody has *ever* cared. No, not since I was so small I could walk under a caterpillar with a silk hat on. Tell me, Miss—Miss—"

"Norcross."

"Tell me, Miss Norcross, when *you* were a youngster, did anybody—"

"Don't! Please don't!" she interrupted. "Don't ask me that!"

A lump was in her throat. Her eyes smarted with sudden, unshed tears.

Carroll turned back to her work. Once more her eager fingers flew over the keyboard that was writing messages of destiny under the guise of documents and business letters.

A moment Lawrence stood looking at this strange girl. Then, saying no more, he walked from the room.

And the echo of his footfalls, down the passageway, seemed beating on the heart of Carroll Ingraham.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOHN PENCOYD SIGNS.

WITH an effort of the will, she dismissed this young man from her thoughts—this rather extraordinary young man, so different from what she had expected a son of the House of Pencoyd would have to be—and once more flung herself full-drive into her work.

Carroll's powers of concentration were good. She really forced herself to forget Lawrence. The task went on, harder than ever.

At four forty all the data and letters had been transcribed, all neatly laid in two piles, ready for John Pencoyd's signature. Another pile contained the envelopes, properly addressed. And still Carroll was writing.

Writing what? Something more, for Pencoyd? No, nothing in the least for Pencoyd. Farthest in the world was this, from anything for him! She was writing a letter, to some one not yet to be revealed. A short letter, in forceful sentences. For time was now pressing. The Louis Quar-

torze clock showed that only a few minutes now remained.

The letter was presently done, signed and sealed into one of Pencoyd's best envelopes. On this envelope, Carroll wrote a name and a few lines of direction. She now took from the drawer all the copies of Pencoyd's letters and data, folded them carefully, and sealed them in another, larger envelope. On these, too, she wrote a few words. Evidently she had her plan well formulated, and knew just what she was about. For this was not all. She chose a still larger envelope, addressed it on the machine, and put both the others into it. Perhaps if we had been able to peep over her shoulder and spy on the writing that the three envelopes bore, we should be far wiser than we are. But for the now, let Carroll keep her plannings to herself.

She sealed the largest envelope with unusual care. From her hand-bag she took stamps, putting on enough to carry it safely. She tested it on Pencoyd's little letter-scales, added ten cents above the requisite amount, and in ink wrote: "Special Delivery." Whatever her plan, obviously no grass was to grow under the feet of its on-rushing.

Carroll took her big, precious letter, and put it in the pocket of her coat, on the leather divan. She smiled.

"I guess that's all, for now, for a beginning," she judged.

Her eyes fell on the little hand-bag, whence she had taken the stamps. Those eyes grew very sad—implacable, too, hungry for justice. She opened the bag again, and took out a much-worn paper, almost broken along the creases.

"Father!" she whispered. "Oh, my poor father!"

We have seen this paper before. Six years ago Ashbel Ingraham, on the night of his death, put it for safekeeping into the family Bible, bearing the truth he longed to tell in case of any accident to him.

At sight of the paper, of the somewhat faded lines traced on it by her father's hand, long in the grave, a moment's tears welled up in Carroll's dark eyes. From her heart she sighed. But then she put away all weakness. She winked the tears away,

bit her lip, brought herself back to discipline. The moment now almost at hand was to be none for sentiment.

With the paper in hand, a tangible message from the dead—a message that seemed to call aloud to her for justice from beyond the shadowy confines of death—Carroll sat down in front of the fireplace, where now the logs had burned down to a bed of coals that glowed like vengeful thoughts.

There she waited, now studying the much-folded paper, now musing into the fire.

Though every word had long since been learned by heart and had become a part of her, she read:

I, Ashbel Ingraham, have committed a grievous crime for friendship's sake. To keep my most trusted friend from ruin and imprisonment, I have lent him ten thousand four hundred and fifty dollars from the funds of the Dartford Institution. If he fail to repay, there is no such thing in this world as honor, faith, or loyalty. As Heaven is my judge, my motive was pure. May God move my friend to play the part of honor! The future is dark, but I have faith in God.

A lump rose in the girl's throat, but she suppressed it. No, no, this was no hour for sentiment! Something almost like a vision of the strange vicissitudes and the on-flowing currents of human life rose before her, as she once more folded the paper, put it back into her bag, and laid the bag once more on the divan. The old, time-proved philosophy that time solves all, came to her mind, and comforted her.

Time solves all! Her father had feared death; but he had died, and that bitterness was over and done with. He had feared the dark future for his wife and child. Well, the wife lay beside him, now, in the deep grave. Part of the dreaded future had already become the past; and the child, the little frail girl, the victim of all, here she was sitting by the fire of Judas, with instruments of justice in her keeping. Here she was awaiting his return.

Time solves all! The wheel of fate, ever on-rolling, echoes down the Via Sacra of immutable recompenses.

Now the lower-sinking sun, tired with a

day of hard work, trying to woo the world back to springtide again, was redly creeping up the panels and bookcases. Carroll saw a set of Carlyle there. She got up, chose "Past and Present," and opened it to Chapter II, "The Sphinx," that best suited her mood.

Back in the big chair by the fire, she fell to reading. She paused at salient passages, and smiled.

Foolish men imagine that because judgment for an evil thing is delayed, there is no justice. Judgment is many times delayed some day or two—but it is as sure as life, it is as sure as death! Forget that, thou hast forgotten all. Success will nevermore attend thee. No more success; mere sham success—rising ever higher, toward its Tarpeian Rock.

"I wonder," mused Carroll, now with heart and soul more at peace, more calm for the inevitable and on-drawing conflict of revealment, "I wonder if that man ever read Carlyle? Or if he'd understand? He said it was all legal, the thing he did to my father. What would he think of *this*?

"The din of triumphant law-logic, and all the shaking of horse-hair wigs and learned sergeant gowns having comfortably ended—what says the high and highest court to the verdict? For it is the court of courts, that same, where the universal soul of fact and very truth sits president—and thitherward, more and more swiftly—all causes—crowd for reversal—for reversal with costs. Dost thou know that court? Hast thou ever had any law practise there?

"Oceans of horse-hair, continents of parchment, and learned-sergeant eloquence, were it continued till the learned tongue wore itself small in the indefatigable learned mouth, cannot make unjust just. Enforce it by never such statuting, three readings, royal assents; blow it to the four winds with all manner of quilted trumpeters and pursuivants, in the rear of them stand never so many gibbets and hangmen, it will not stand, it cannot stand!"

Smiling, she closed the book and let it lie a moment idly in her lap. A great peace had come upon her. It was not anger, now, she felt, but a calm, steady sense of determination; of being an instrument of justice, invincible as any natural force; of coming now to pay the debt owed to her father by this devious, silent, wickedly

plotting highwayman along the roads of life.

"Injustice cannot stand, it will not stand!" she repeated, and felt her soul exalted for the task confronting her.

The big chair held her body, as she rested there with both slim feet on the fender; but now her mind roamed far afield, ranging time and place. Now her thoughts were back at the old-fashioned white house on Cumberland Avenue, in the little New England city; now they were dwelling on the bedroom of her mother, that last sad night; and now they shifted to the appalling sight of her father dying at the foot of the stairway, there in her mother's arms, while she, Carroll—a frightened, trembling little girl—held in weak arms the great Bible toward which the failing hand extended in its supreme effort to proclaim: "*The truth—is there!*"

To the quiet old cemetery her thoughts now wandered, where father and mother both were fast asleep under the elms and cypresses; and then away to Aunt Joe Hawke's lugubrious, purgatorial lodging-house, that had quenched all her joy of youth which might, perhaps, have been revived in sweet environments, even after the great and numbing loss. Sadly Carroll pondered all the years of loneliness and study and hard work, all the denials of love, the evolutions of hate, all the might-have-beens—the tragic might-have-beens.

Came, at length, her musings to the passing-strange events of this wonder-day, and to this great miracle of revealment. And so they dwelt on Pencoyd, on Lawrence, and last of all on the special-delivery letter now waiting to play its part in the swiftly unfolding drama of destiny's compensations.

And as five o'clock drew near, the tension of her nerves keyed up, like orchestral instruments tuning for the overture of a long, difficult, triumphant symphony.

Eight minutes to five brought John Pencoyd back again. He entered in a manner that suggested disturbance. There lay something, in the glance of his varnished eye, in the set of his jaw, which told of trouble. Carroll sensed this trouble had to do with Lawrence. Somehow, she felt not

wholly glad. A little, insinuating tendril of anxiety insinuated itself into her anger and resentment, even into the hate and passion for revenge that now burned up more hotly than ever, at sight of this Judas friend.

Carroll's state of mind would greatly have puzzled her, had she had time or opportunity to examine it. But the forward-pressing of events muted all self-questioning. On-rushing currents of a cataract stay not to parley with some tentative, small eddy in a hollow of the mossy bank.

The girl forgot everything now, as she stood up to face this man; everything but this—that the moment of all hoped-for, waited-for moments had come. As a fowler watches the bird flutter down to the leafy branch whose greenery hides the bird-lime, Carroll watched John Pencoyd. Her heart had begun to beat up, like a ruffle of drums triumphant. She felt that the banners of victory were ready for breaking-out to the winds of joy.

Pencoyd, however, saw nothing of the new light in Carroll's eyes. He did not, in fact, do more than glance at her, and nod. The half-kindly manner, almost paternal, in which he had before regarded her once or twice, had entirely vanished. The man looked hard and ugly, now; grim and bitter. Carroll smiled.

Pencoyd walked directly over to the table, and looked down at the letters. He rubbed his big, strong hands together. Carroll saw how hairy and powerful they were, and how, under the fat on his neck and shoulders, steel muscles seemed to lie. This man was a fighter, right enough. And that, she could admire; but what she hated was his fighting foul. No holds were barred, evidently enough, in his wrestlings with life and the world.

A half-conscious wonder came to her, troubling the pools of her mind—was Lawrence, too, a fighter, and did he fight foul? That apparently half-whimsical fellow, whose words and deeds had seemed to show warm heart and gentle soul—was he, too, of this ruthless breed?

John Pencoyd sat down, took up a pen and dipped it in ink. Carroll came close, and stood at his right hand.

"All ready?" asked Pencoyd. "Everything all done?"

"Yes," she answered, burning with eagerness to see him sign the articles of his own damnation.

"Good," he approved, without looking up. His eyes were reading her work, one of the letters. Then, in a curt, square hand, he signed his name: *John Pencoyd*.

Carroll took away the letter, blotted the name and laid the sheet at one side. Silently, efficiently, she stood there to serve him, to facilitate the important work of his putting his name to these incriminating things that he had dictated. He continued to read, swiftly, all-seeingly, with an intelligence luminous and keen. Hers matched his, as she stood there at his side, smiling coldly, with lips whose soft redness now seemed to have grown dangerous and hard.

On, on he read, and signed, each signature making potentially greater the sum-total of his possible disaster. And as he signed, Carroll watched—and smiled.

Had Pencoyd seen that smile—but Pencoyd did not see it. He did not glance up at this now all-but-unconsidered bit of human mechanism in his plans. To him, her importance now had sunk, perhaps, to the same level that an organ-stop possesses to a skilled organist engaged in the rendition of an oratorio—something to be used at will, but nothing to be given heed to.

No breath of air warned John Pencoyd of the swing of the Damocletian sword now brushing back and forth above his head, suspended by the very tiniest of threads.

Within a few moments of the major event of his life, he still sensed nothing. Thus, too, the comfortable and proud masters of Pompeii in their amphitheater, that supreme afternoon in the year 79, had no suspicion of what an hour was destined to bring forth.

Fate must have smiled, even as Carroll was smiling, while Pencoyd read and signed those letters.

Now everything was done, and Pencoyd looked up.

"Very good," he approved, curtly. "No errata. Blake was right; you are efficient. One hundred per cent."

"Thank you," said Carroll. "I always try to finish what I begin."

"Please put the letters in their envelopes and seal them," he directed, gathering up the other papers and sliding them into the table drawer. "I'll have my man post them, and we'll call it a day."

She nodded, and obeyed. He sat back, watching her with only half-attention. He appeared to be waiting for something.

Carroll sealed and stamped all the letters.

"Ready," she announced.

Pencoyd pressed a button on the table. The butler came.

"Mail these," commanded Pencoyd. The butler gathered them all up and was departing when Carroll asked:

"Take this, too, please?"

From under her coat on the leather divan she fetched her special-delivery letter, fat and stuffed with Pencoyd's secrets, and gave it to the butler.

"You don't mind, do you?" she couldn't help inquiring of Pencoyd. This was too sweet a morsel to be left untasted. "I took the liberty of using a little of your stationery for a personal matter."

"Mind? Of course not, my dear Miss—Miss—"

"Norcross."

"Of course not! Pardon me for letting your name escape me. I'm glad you made yourself at home."

"I used my own stamps," said she, as the butler left.

"Needn't have!" He smiled a little.

"Yes, I preferred to. *Meum* and *tuum* are different, altogether, in matters of real value. That's been the secret of your success, all along, hasn't it?"

"Oh, yes, yes, of course!" His tone grew curt. He fingered his bristly mustache, and shot a glance at her. "By the way," he changed the subject, "has—anyone been here?"

She had sat down across the table from him, looked him fair in the face. The shadow of an uneasy expression crossed his features, in the fading afternoon glow.

"Lawrence Pencoyd has been here," she answered, with complete directness.

"At what time?"

"Perhaps an hour ago."

"He wanted—"

"To see you."

"H-m! Said he was coming back?"

"He left without saying anything."

Silence. Carroll glanced at the clock. How long, probably, would it take that butler to go down in the elevator, walk to the corner—or send some one—and drop those letters into the box on the electric-light pole that Carroll had noted there?

Pencoyd remained thinking. His heavy fingers drummed a little on the table-top. Carroll sat looking at those fingers. No ring graced them, not even one. They looked agile and hairy as the legs of a tarantula, and surely they possessed formidable strength. The hands of a strangler, Carroll thought, must be like those. Well, why not? Was not Pencoyd a strangler? That his clutches were taken on men's finances rather than their windpipes made no difference. It was, at last analysis, all the same thing.

Still, silence held, save for the dull drumming of those uneasy fingers. All at once Pencoyd looked up at Carroll, from under the shaggy brows.

"I suppose you'll be wanting to get home, now," said he. "I'll have the limousine take you. I can pay you at once, and settle the matter. Will you accept ten dollars for the day's work?"

"No," answered Carroll. Something harder even than Pencoyd's eyes vibrated in her tones. "Ten dollars?" Suddenly she laughed.

Astonished, John Pencoyd remained there, motionless, staring at her. Though little he still knew it, a supreme moment had arrived in his life and in the life of this efficient girl now with a strange new expression facing him.

CHAPTER IX.

REVEALMENT.

"YOU refuse ten dollars?" he asked, suddenly. "My dear Miss Norcross, your price is high!"

"Ten dollars!" she laughed, and shrugged her shoulders. Then she got up,

quite suddenly, and walked over to the big front window. Pencoyd still continued to stare at her, a bit angry, more than a bit puzzled. This man hated being puzzled more than he did being angry.

At the large, arched window, divided by its wrought-iron mullions, Carroll put aside the sheer curtains, and looked out.

Very low, now, the sun was sinking, down over the city roofs all crenelated with chimney-pots. Level light was slanting along the street, toward the park. Evening would soon be at hand. Dusk would soon be falling, when windows and automobile-lights would begin to twinkle, and when, as the French say, it would be *entre chien et loup*. Electric-light poles, at this time o' day, possess an added interest.

The high pole on the diagonally opposite corner seemed just now to be Carroll's Mecca of observation; the pole with the letter-box attached. She stood leaning into the embrasure of the window, one hand on the window-jamb, the other arm and hand down along her lithe side. Her face remained impassive, but its color had grown heightened out of its ivory tones into a kind of cream-and-rose.

Thus she watched the letter-box; and thus John Pencoyd watched her. Subtle tensions had all at once developed in the atmosphere of the library.

"Nothing wrong, is there?" a vague suspicion came to the man. No, what could be wrong? Those letters—he had read them all, himself. He had seen her put them into the envelopes and seal them; had seen the butler carry them all away. What could be wrong? And moreover, Blake had recommended this girl most highly for discretion. Why, nonsense, nothing could have slipped!

And yet—

Some men possess instincts that warn them. They have the *flair* for peril, like animals. John Pencoyd felt a tingle of prescience. He got up and walked toward the girl.

"Miss Norcross!"

She answered nothing, only laughed again, and kept on looking out of that confounded window. He felt a sudden irritation. Not in a long time had any one,

man or woman, crossed his will—if we except Lawrence.

"Miss Norcross!" he repeated, stopping close behind her. "I am addressing you!"

"Yes?" she queried, unmoved.

"Your work is at an end," said he. "Ten dollars is a very liberal price for your services. Still, those services have been exceptionally efficient. I am disposed not to quibble with you. I will give you fifteen. And the car will be ready in ten minutes."

"Ah, but I may not be!" she answered; and now he heard another note in her voice, with undertones that puzzled and irritated him, so that a little flush of deeper red fingered up along his neck, his jaw, his cheek.

What the devil could all this mean? Could this girl, this person whom Blake had described as indifferent to men, as hostile to men—could she be trying to start some kind of absurd entanglement with him? Some adventuress campaign, or what-not? Some—

She raised her hand, with a quick, triumphant motion.

"See there!" bade she, and pointed.

The financier, instinctively obeying, also came to the window, and looked out. His heavy brows had drawn together in a frown of great displeasure. Sunlight, red and dying, reflected from a window across the street, struck his face and brought out the harshness of his features in high relief. Carroll's face remained shaded, in the lee of the deep embrasure.

"Well, what is it?" demanded John Pencoyd.

"Your man! See? He's reached the letter-box!"

"This is very odd, Miss Norcross! Really, your conduct—"

"Look! He's raising the slide. Now the letters are going in. I see min—the big, thick one!" Her voice exulted.

"Will you kindly explain?"

"Ah! Now my letter's gone, too! It's in the box!"

"Miss Norcross! I'll ring for Mrs. Mackenzie, if you're quite ready to go. She will show you down."

"Not till I'm paid, in full!"

He drew out a pocketbook, and from it took fifteen dollars.

"That moment," said he, "need not be delayed."

She only glanced at him, and smiled.

"I shall not offer this a third time!" he warned, his mouth closing like a steel trap. "And you cannot remain here longer. I will have you taken to your lodgings, or to the office of Blake and Campbell, just as you choose."

"I choose neither, just yet. I don't want Mrs. Mackenzie here, nor do you. Your fifteen dollars is a mere absurdity. And as for Blake and Campbell, I'm not returning there. My work, there, is at an end."

"What?"

"I have decided to take another, far more lucrative position."

He peered at her, convinced that her mind had suddenly given way and that this talk was flavored with insanity. She only laughed again, and faced him. She clasped her hands in front of her, and smiled; and something in that smile put a cold chill of the fear of God up and down the strong backbone of John Pencoyd.

"Miss Norcross—"

"That's not my name, either," she interrupted, in a quiet, even voice. "You don't understand, eh? That doesn't matter in the least, yet. What matters for you, just now, is that those letters, bearing your signature, are all in that letter-box, now. They're all under the protection and keeping of the United States government, and will inevitably be delivered. No wealth, influence or power can possibly recall a single one of them. You understand?"

"I understand that this interview is on the point of speedy termination," he answered, his creaking voice taut as an air-plane-stay.

"Understand this, too," she returned. "My own letter has gone, also. Your own servant mailed it. And you can never by any possibility get it back. It's going to be delivered. That's tremendously important to you."

"To *me*? What possible relation can your correspondence have with mine?"

"No, I sha'n't tell you that. Not yet!"

John Pencoyd found absolutely nothing to say. Mechanically he put away his money. For the first time in his life he had met a situation that, in the language of the prize-ring, had "stopped" him. A situation which had simultaneously assailed him from so many angles that he knew not where to strike back, or how—or whether he should strike at all.

All he could do was look at Carroll, in the fading light. The mockery of her smile cut him like whips across the face. A woman defying him, like this, laughing at him, talking in riddles, covertly menacing him—gods, it could not be! It must not be!

Suddenly the girl walked to the table, caught up the note-book that contained all the day's work, and tossed it into the red brazier of coals in the fireplace.

"That reassures you, doesn't it?" she mocked. "*That's* gone, anyhow!"

"You are a woman, and as such are entitled to certain respect and immunity, in the house of a gentleman. If you were a man, I'd—treat you otherwise. But as a woman, you are safe. I earnestly request you, however, to withdraw from here before any further unpleasantness develops."

He approached her, crossed his arms over his big chest, and looked fixedly at her. The fireglow fell on her face. He saw that she was smiling, still. That ruddy light misted her shapely head with a kind of golden-brown halo formed by her masses of hair.

She was first to speak, after a long moment of silent, mutual appraisal.

"I am more than just a woman," said she. "I am a very special woman. *The* woman!"

"Yes?" he queried. "My dear Miss X, you interest me. But perhaps if you revealed that charming identity—"

"Ah, your curiosity is really aroused? You ask me who I am?"

He looked at her with hard suspicion. What might this game be? Blackmail? Vampire traps? Assault? Had this girl, perhaps, a pistol in her bosom? Was some fantastic, unmotivated absurdity about to be staged here in the library, in the fireglow and sunset glow that mingled there?

John Pencoyd was afraid. But he intended to fight. Give him credit for that. This man fought foul, when cornered, but he never turned his back. Rats fight thus. They, too, are crafty. Craft now whispered to Pencoyd: "Smile, and be suave!"

"You ask me who I am?" demanded Carroll.

Her question bit. Pencoyd obeyed Craft's dictum, though; and smiled as he answered:

"Yes. If we really knew each other, that might be a good basis for some common understanding. Might it not? Therefore I repeat the question." At all hazards, he must temporize, involve her in parley, trap her if he could. In a pinch, always spar for time—that had long been one of John Pencoyd's fighting mottoes. "Yes; who are you? That's a frank question. Give me a frank answer."

"I'm your new secretary."

"My—"

"Your new private secretary. I told you I'd left Blake and Campbell for a better position, very much better. Well, that's what I meant."

"I see," he humored her, still smiling. His eyes had glazed themselves, impenetrably. "I am highly honored, to have such an efficient young woman choose me as her employer. Ought I not, however, to know you better? One's real name, of course, is usually given in such cases."

"It never was, to Blake and Campbell."

"I understand. You—"

"You understand nothing, yet." She was smiling, too. The sight of those two, each smiling at the other, yet with deadly enmity at heart, was strange indeed.

"You make it a practise, then, my dear young lady, to work under an alias? How very interesting!"

"Isn't it? Especially when you yourself are the cause of it!"

"I?" He spread disclaiming palms. "Surely there's some mistake in identity, here. I know nothing of you. I had never heard of you till this morning. I had never seen you, in all my life!"

"Quite possibly you've never seen me, till to-day, but at one time you surely heard my voice."

"When?"

"Six years ago."

"Indeed? That's not very specific, is it? Tell me where?"

"Dartford."

"Ah, now! That's better!" John Pencoyd's face did not look as if he felt better. A very perceptible shade of anxiety passed over it, but his eyes remained calm. He seemed to be growing colder, more self-repressed, as he felt danger closing in. The instinct that had warned him of that danger a little while ago, now was bidding him watch all holds, be ready for a strangle-grip. Find out all; admit nothing! Another motto of John Pencoyd's.

"Dartford, eh?" asked he. "Many people doubtless knew me at Dartford, whom I didn't know. And six years ago, you must have been little more than a child."

"Only a child. But in those days I had a home, a mother, a father."

"Well? What is this to me? Why tell me about all this?"

"You robbed me of them all."

"I? Impossible!"

"No; true."

The flush was fading out of his face. He was beginning to look a trifle gray, but he was smiling, still.

"I robbed you? How so?"

"Your memory is short, indeed! Mine is longer. In it I can see an old-fashioned white house on Cumberland Avenue—"

"Cumberland Avenue!"

"A library, in that house. Two men sitting in that library. A little girl coming to the door, with an algebra in her hand. A thick-necked man, with his back to the door, paying no attention to that child. No, the man was too busy to notice a weak little girl. Too busy ruining and entrapping the other man in the library with him—the thin, careworn, God-fearing man who for the sake of friendship was willing to commit a crime!"

"What nonsense is all this?" demanded Pencoyd, his jaw ugly. Not all his cold self-control could quite hold the brake on his anger, born of fear. "What farrago are you trying to get off?"

"Neither nonsense nor farrago, but the living truth! You know me now?"

"Not from Adam! In my day I've listened to some wild imaginings, but nothing to exceed this!" John Pencoyd was fighting hard, the battle of denial.

"So you forget, do you?" she gibed. "For a man of your success and your great business interests, your memory seems strangely defective. I see I shall have to refresh it still more. I shall have to give you a few more details. Then perhaps you will understand just how you robbed me!"

"More unfounded flights of your imagination!"

"And how you're going to pay me back!"

"My dear young woman—"

"You robbed me by robbing that good man who sacrificed himself for you. By robbing him of money, reputation, honor!" Carroll's hands, now, were clenched to fists. "That man you robbed—died. And then you killed that man's widow, by letting the man's name go down to disgrace. By letting the widow be stripped of every penny, even to the insurance—by letting her lose her home—everything!"

"My dear girl, where on earth did you ever hear all this fantastic balderdash?"

"Not that, but horrible reality! How do I know the story? I lived it!"

"You? You are—"

"I am Carroll Ingraham, daughter of Ashbel Ingraham!"

John Pencoyd's mind staggered, but his body stood firm. He took the blow full in the face, and kept his feet. Save for a certain graying of his countenance, a slight downward droop of the jaw, you could hardly have told how hard-hit the man really was.

For a moment he remained silent, groping for handholds, for something to sustain him, to bear him up in this moment of disaster. Then reaction came. The old and brazen nerve of the man reasserted itself. He managed a dry laugh, and nodded thrice.

"An interesting story," he managed to articulate, though a bit thickly. "But really, Miss Ingraham, it doesn't touch me in the least. There's no foundation of fact, whatever, in any charge you make." The

man was betraying himself, now, by his unusual verbosity, but of this he was not aware. "An interesting story, yes, but quite irrelevant to the facts. Yes, I knew your father. We had dealings. But not of the kind you describe. In fact, they were quite the opposite. It was *I* who helped *him*! Why, if I hadn't stood behind him, two or three times—yes, three, that's it—he would have—"

"Not another word of that!" cried the girl, her cheeks flushed. "Only a cur would add calumny of the dead to all these other crimes of theft and treachery!"

"This won't do, Miss Ingraham!" warned Pencoyd, sharply. A little of his self-mastery was beginning to ooze away.

"In my own house I don't permit any one to apply such epithets to me. No, nor anywhere else, for that matter. Not even the daughter of my most trusted friend, Ashbel Ingraham, has any such license. Moderate your remarks, or consider this interview at an end."

She laughed at that, almost gaily. Her anger seemed to have faded, and again that keen, cold expression had returned to her.

"At an end," she repeated. "How very amusing! Really, Mr. Pencoyd, you are something of an unconscious humorist, aren't you? But as an analyst, not over keen. You mistake the beginning for the end. For, as a matter of fact, our dealings have only just begun. They are to be long—and interesting."

He tried to laugh at her, again; but that was the most dismal croak of merriment ever you heard. The mainspring of his laughing-apparatus seemed to have snapped. She came closer, confronting him with eyes that saw into him and through him, as if his soul had lain cased in glass. Again that shiver of cold fear tingled along his spine.

"Remember," said she, "I am your private secretary now, at a salary I shall assign when I get time to think of such trivial details. You have employed me to liquidate your estate—for the benefit of Ashbel Ingraham's. That may take some time, but with patience we shall accomplish it."

"My appreciation of humor is only ex-

ceeded by your own, my dear Miss Ingraham." His hand, raised, was eloquent of mockery.

"Very well. Two persons with a proper sense of humor should be able to agree on a business proposition of this character."

"Let me call your attention—quite in a humorous way, of course—to the fact that blackmail is severely punished under the Penal Code. I think the crime and the penalty are defined in Section—"

"Not far, perhaps, from that which treats of receiving stolen property? Or maybe the section dealing with misappropriation of funds—which misappropriation, in your case, was covered by the money my father stole to help you keep out of prison."

"A merry jester, aren't you?" demanded he. "How much time—since you know the law so well—is required to outlaw such matters?"

"Four months less than have already elapsed since the time we both remember."

"And as matters of evidence, what is the value of hearsay?"

"None. But documentary evidence is different, isn't it?"

"Eh?" Now another note came into his creaking voice. "You say—"

"Why, you understand me!"

"I suppose you are referring to papers incriminating your father. Just as a matter of information to you, my dear Miss Ingraham, and to set your mind at rest, all those papers were destroyed, years ago."

"I know. The metal box, eh? In the library table. You robbed that box, too, didn't you? And carried away all the papers in the case?"

"All—in the matter of your father's unfortunate speculation, from which I tried to save him, and failed. All."

"No, not quite all."

"What?"

"You overlooked one paper."

"One—paper?"

"Yes. It wasn't in the box, you see."

"Not in the box?"

"No. It was in a place where, of course, it never could have been found by you. It was in the Bible."

"More of your nonsense!" he mocked, though his jowls were ashen.

"Nonsense? When I myself have that paper? And when that paper specifically states—"

"You say you have a paper?"

"It is my dearest treasure."

"You do ill to leave your dearest treasure unprotected, my dear Miss Ingraham," Pencoyd laughed. "How do you know but what I recognized you after I had signed those letters? How do you know but what, when your back was turned and you were looking so exultantly out that window"—and he nodded toward the dimming square of light—"yes, how do you know but what I set in motion means to get possession of just that paper?"

Her brow contracted. A sudden fear shot its pang through her heart.

Pencoyd inserted forefinger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket. Carroll's eyes widened. Her lips opened. She heard the rustle of a paper in the man's pocket, and by the dim light saw the mockery in his eyes.

Quick as thought she turned, ran to the leather couch, caught up her hand-bag and tore it open. With fingers that trembled she searched the little inner pocket where she had always kept the paper.

"Oh!"

The exclamation involuntarily escaped her, with an immense relief, as she found the paper still there. But Pencoyd's laugh, from the doorway, told her how he had tricked and trapped her.

"Thank you very much indeed," he smiled, with mordant courtesy. "Infinite thanks, my dear Miss Ingraham, for having laid your trump card in my hand!"

He turned, a second. She heard the grating of a key, the slide of a bolt. The key dropped into his pocket.

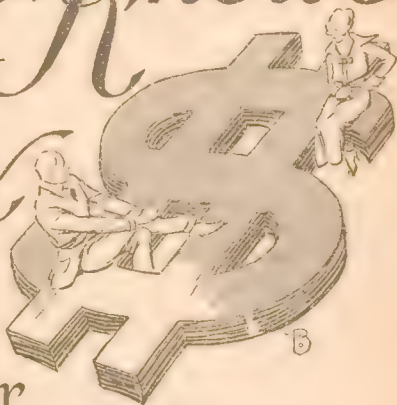
Laughing with cold malice, John Pencoyd advanced toward her, his hand outstretched.

"And now, my very dear Miss Private Secretary," he giped, "now as a preliminary to our liquidating process, I'll thank you for that chiefest treasure of yours! I'll thank you for that paper!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Business Knows No Sex

by Marie B. Schrader



"GEE! That's the big chief!" Elizabeth Woods sprang to her feet as the buzzer at her elbow sounded a peremptory call to the office of James Clark, head of the big department store of Clark & Co. "Wonder what he wants! Maybe it's—"

But she did not finish the thought that made her face flush and her brown eyes sparkle. Instead, she busied herself in hunting for a small mirror and powder-puff, which even several years of steady application to business had not caused her to forego.

James Clark believed in the system of promotion. He did not approve of filling positions with men and women not familiar with the ways of Clark & Co. "Let other firms employ what they call 'young blood,'" he liked to say with a smile. "Our store must be another home to our employees."

Among the women holding important positions with the Clark firm, no one had more perfectly measured up to every requirement than Elizabeth Woods. Beginning as a saleswoman at the ribbon counter, she had demonstrated her ability at once. A charm of personality was a valuable asset, and one promotion after another came her way until she had reached the position of head of the women's suit department, where she was called upon to exercise unusual tact.

"She won't stay there long," remarked Mr. Clark.

Then came a time when Elizabeth adjusted a very difficult matter involving some several thousand dollars and the patronage of a wealthy customer.

Mr. Clark was so pleased with her management of the affair that he sent for her.

"In a few days I shall have a surprise for you," he said, after congratulating her upon her diplomacy and keen business sense. Then he talked about something else.

Elizabeth's heart began to beat as she mused upon the possibilities of promotion.

"What could Mr. Clark have in mind for me?" she wondered; then as the days went by, she dismissed the matter, until little Ruth, a messenger-girl, came rushing in to her with the news that she had just heard Mr. Clark and his partners talking, and they had decided to make Miss Woods assistant manager.

Elizabeth could hardly believe it. To become assistant manager was something above her wildest dreams. She was so happy over the prospect that she could not sleep for several nights, wondering when and how the good fortune would happen. She had promised Ruth not to say a word to any one, and when the summons came from Mr. Clark to appear very much surprised.

It was quite natural; then, that the great moment having arrived, she should apply a dash of powder to her nose and give one hasty glance in the little mirror as she breathed a sigh of relief.

With a rosy flush of anticipation on her cheeks and her eyes shining with more than their usual brilliancy, Elizabeth entered the office of James Clark. She could hardly restrain herself from saying, "I know what you want me for, and I will make good on the job," but her thoughts were interrupted by Mr. Clark.

Elizabeth wondered if she were mistaken, or if he really seemed embarrassed. She was so nervous herself that she hardly knew how he looked.

"Miss Woods," began the big chief, "your services have been under observation, and I have been thinking of some suitable way in which to express our appreciation. I had hoped to be able to make you assistant manager of this store, but—"

Oh, that little word, *but*—!

Elizabeth felt her strength fail. She was conscious of the fact that her face must be red, but she knew that she kept her eyes fixed politely on Mr. Clark.

"But," he continued, "circumstances which were most unforeseen have arisen, and because of these I am unable to give you the promotion to which I believe you are fitted. However, I can make you the head of another department, and in course of time things may yet come your way."

All Elizabeth's air castles fell in a heap. To be transferred from one department to another did not mean much to her; to be assistant manager did.

Mr. Clark then went on to explain that she would have had the position if they could afford to dispense with the services of Henry Foster, who was invaluable to them, having been with Clark & Co. for a number of years.

"But my department cannot in any way interfere with Mr. Foster's," Elizabeth ventured to say.

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Clark kindly; "when I spoke of the 'surprise' in store for you I certainly had the position of assistant manager in mind, although that post has never before been filled by a woman. However, in my opinion, sex has nothing to do with business matters. You have proved yourself fully as capable as any man in our employ."

"Then, may I ask," inquired Elizabeth,

"why Mr. Foster is given the preference over me?"

"You have no other position waiting for you, have you?" countered Mr. Clark.

"Why, no! I would never think of leaving Clark & Co.," replied Elizabeth loyally.

"Well, that is just the cause of the difficulty—Mr. Foster has. In fact, unless we give him this position we would lose him, and he is very valuable to us."

"Oh, I didn't know—"

"Mr. Foster has just received a flattering offer from the Chadworth firm in St. Louis, and it was a question of losing him or of giving him a promotion equal in salary and importance to the one just offered him. I am sure you will understand, and I hope that you will accept the change in position to another department with a small increase in salary—not as much as you should have by any means, but the best I can do just now. At any rate, for the present, I hope you will not feel too badly about the assistant manager's position."

Elizabeth returned to her desk in the corner of the women's suit department with an unmistakable expression of disappointment on her face.

"Congratulations!" exclaimed her assistant. "Ruth just told me the good news. You're lucky, all right."

"Look here, Mamie Simons!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "Gaze on my face carefully the next time. I must look as fit for congratulations as a bride waiting for a delayed bridegroom—only, in my case, it was a promotion I expected."

"I'm sorry. It's a shame. What happened?"

Elizabeth told her, laughing as she spoke, but it was a bitter laugh.

"Mr. Henry Foster is a lucky man," she wound up. "They can talk all they like about sex equality in business and all that sort of stuff—I used to believe that Clark & Co. didn't care whether a man or a woman held the position, so long as ability was the watchword, but I've changed my mind on that point. The man always wins out."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mamie reassuringly. "I know lots of cases where men don't win out. Sometimes they do, for a

while, but a woman can outwit them every time."

"Not a chance in the present instance," remarked Elizabeth. "Foster has the job, and naturally he is going to keep it."

"Sure!" replied Mamie. "The question is, how long will he keep it? There's nothing like 'watchful waiting,' as an ex-President once remarked so truthfully."

"That's all well enough for a great man like the President to say," answered Elizabeth. "If I were President, I wouldn't mind, but I am only a store employee with a sick mother and several brothers and sisters to clothe and educate."

"No use talking, it's tough luck," commented Mamie; "and I must say I can't see how he can put it over you in any way when it comes to ability and personality and all the rest of it."

Elizabeth began to laugh. Mamie looked at her in surprise. "I don't see how you can take it so good naturedly," she said. "If it was me it happened to, I'd feel like scratching somebody's face—no names mentioned, of course."

"Oh, what's the use of losing my temper!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "In my experience in business I've always found that getting mad never gets anybody anywhere. No—I refuse to spoil my sweet disposition by letting it turn sour altogether."

All the same Elizabeth was very near the verge of tears. But she struggled to keep control over herself, so that no one would suspect the shock she had just suffered. She wanted to appear in the best of humor when Foster chanced to stroll her way, as she felt certain he would do.

As it happened, it was almost closing time when Foster sauntered casually in her direction.

"I was wondering if you have an engagement for dinner this evening?" he asked with a smile. "Maybe you would come with me—anywhere you like."

"Thanks. You are very kind; but I must go home," answered Elizabeth. "I have to do my bit with the dishes, you see," she added with forced jollity.

"Too bad!" observed Foster. "You needn't—if you don't want to—"

Elizabeth caught the drift of his thoughts

and she determined to steer him clear of the shoals of sentiment. She was in no mood to be made love to again by a man she had once rejected, especially when he had just succeeded in winning the position she had counted upon obtaining. However, the next moment she felt rather ashamed of herself, for after all Foster had not sought the place—he had won it by fair means, and was not to be blamed because Mr. Clark had chosen him in preference to herself.

"Why," she reasoned, "did that wretched St. Louis firm have to make him that offer when it did! Why couldn't it have waited a few days until I was safely installed in the job?"

Elizabeth had always believed more or less in fate and the power of mysterious influences guiding the events in one's life. If Foster's offer had arrived *after* instead of *before*—nothing could have induced Mr. Clark to remove her from the position. Foster, of course, would have accepted the offer of the Western firm, and Clark & Co. would have lost a "valuable man," but—well, it would have been fate.

"Oh, what's the use trying to puzzle such things out?" she thought. Then, realizing that she must put on a brave front, she said: "I haven't congratulated you yet on your good luck in being made assistant manager."

"Oh, then, you have heard—"

"Yes. Mr. Clark told me himself this morning."

"It was quite a surprise," said Foster.

"Was it?" asked Elizabeth.

Foster looked at her keenly. "Why, what do you mean? I never was more amazed in my life?"

"Of course," said Elizabeth. "I didn't mean that it wasn't. Mr. Clark said that it was a surprise, even to him, since he had intended giving *me* the position."

"Really?" exclaimed Foster. "That's too bad! I am sorry if I have kept you from the promotion."

Although he said he was sorry, somehow Elizabeth didn't believe him. That was merely politeness on his part, she thought, for it wasn't human nature to be genuinely regretful.

"Don't let my disappointment worry you," she rejoined. "If I had been given the position over your head, I give you my word I wouldn't lose any sleep over the fact!"

"It's a shame," sympathized Foster. "I wouldn't accept the promotion—knowing as I now do, that it had been intended for you—if it were not for the fact that Mr. Clark insists—"

"I know," interrupted Elizabeth, who felt that Foster was a little too conscious of his importance. "Mr. Clark told me what a valuable man you are to the firm, and they can't afford to lose you."

"He said that, did he?" asked Foster, pride shining in his eyes.

"Why, yes. He said that if you hadn't been so reliable in every way, it would have been different. Did you really think seriously of accepting that Western position?"

"What a strange question!" replied Foster. "How can you ask me that?"

"Oh, I don't know, only the West is a long distance from the East—and New York," she finished. "I have often heard you say that nothing under the sun could induce you to go West. I know how crazy you are about New York."

"Oh, I may have made some such remark, a long time ago—"

Elizabeth didn't give him a chance to finish.

"It was about a week ago, if I remember correctly," she remarked with a sarcastic little expression about the corners of her mouth.

"We all change our opinions when it comes to a bigger salary," said Foster. "I will admit that I shouldn't care to spend the rest of my life in one of the smaller cities, but we can't always choose. And when it comes to the dollar sign, we all are pretty apt to follow in the direction it calls."

"Just the same," observed Elizabeth, "I know that you are delighted that Mr. Clark made you the offer in time to keep you from having to go to St. Louis. Now, if the Western chance had come to me, I shouldn't have hesitated a moment, but would have taken the first train out—that

is, in case Mr. Clark didn't consider *me* valuable enough to insist upon my remaining—"

"Which he would do," politely remarked Foster.

"Oh, it's all well enough to say that, but you can't insist when there isn't an alternative, can you? Suppose it hadn't been possible to make you assistant manager—you would soon be on your way to St. Louis."

Suddenly her eyes shone as an idea came to her.

"What's the matter with my taking the position offered you?"

She looked at him eagerly, but he was slow in replying and seemed rather embarrassed.

"I don't quite understand," he said. "How could you take the position offered to me?"

"Simple enough," replied Elizabeth. "You know what I can do—that I am able to do the work—perhaps not quite as efficiently as you"—there was a faint trace of mockery in her voice—"still I could do it. As a matter of fact, I've got to get more money. I have a family to support, you know, so money is the thing to be considered, not whether I make it in St. Louis or New York. I would hate to leave Clark's, but—yes, I'd do it, and move myself, family, canary bird and cat right out to Missouri."

"But really—"

"Just wait until I unfold my plan of campaign," continued Elizabeth enthusiastically. "It's as simple as marking something down from a dollar to ninety-eight cents. All you have to do is to write to Chadworth's and suggest me for the position offered to you. Since you are not going to accept it, they must have some one else, so—why not me? A recommendation from you would get me the job, I am sure."

Foster reflected a moment.

"Well, what do you think of my scheme?" inquired Elizabeth.

"It's a big idea—if Chadworth agrees," replied Foster. "Suppose he insists upon employing a man? Some firms do, you know."

"Oh, well, in that case—"

"The sex problem again," replied Eliz-

abeth. "In that case, of course, nothing can be done. But since we don't know that they do, there will be no harm in trying, will there?"

"Certainly not," answered Foster. "All I meant is, I can't promise anything except that I will write the letter."

"That's all that's necessary, and I will be very much obliged to you. When will you do it?"

"The first thing in the morning."

Elizabeth was about to turn away, when Foster grasped her by the arm. Looking about to see that they were unobserved, he said:

"Won't you change your mind about the little offer I made you? You know I will have a big enough salary now to make certain that you don't have to wash the dishes," he added with a smile.

"My answer was final," returned Elizabeth, annoyed that he should refer to what she considered a closed subject.

"Oh!"

The next moment he was gone.

About ten days remained before Foster was to assume his new duties. Elizabeth was to be transferred to the new department shortly after.

"Lots of things can happen in that time," she told herself as she speculated upon the number of days required for Foster's letter to arrive in St. Louis and for Chadworth's reply to reach New York. Somehow she had hopes of being successful, although she had sensed the doubt in Foster's mind.

That evening a girl friend, Mary Norton, dropped in for a chat. Elizabeth told her of her disappointment.

"If Chadworth had only held off a few days," she concluded, "I would have another story to tell."

"What did you say was the name of the firm?" inquired Miss Norton.

"Chadworth—the big firm in St. Louis," answered Elizabeth. "If the offer hadn't been such a flattering one, from Mr. Chadworth himself, as Mr. Clark described it, all this wouldn't have happened, for Foster would never have thought of leaving."

"That's funny," commented Miss Norton.

"Funny!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "It's a tragedy in five reels, I should say. Funny!" and she looked at her friend in astonishment.

"Oh, I don't mean what you mean," said Miss Norton. "I was thinking it is funny I can't remember where I heard that name Chadworth before."

"Well, 'most any one could have heard it," replied Elizabeth. "I tell you it's a big house in St. Louis."

"Yes, yes. I understand, but what do I know about St. Louis?" demanded the friend. "Chadworth is rather an unusual name. It's a shame I can't remember. It seems to me that there was something interesting connected with it—guess I'll have to give it up, though."

The conversation shifted to other topics, and later the two decided to spend the evening at a motion-picture house.

The film had progressed well into the last reel, and the hero was begging the lovely ingénue over the telephone to "Be sure you write the letter at once; it's very important," when Miss Norton seized Elizabeth's arm so tightly that it hurt.

"I have it!" she exclaimed. "It all comes back to me now—where I heard the name Chadworth. What the leading man said over the phone just now is almost identical with what the other man said."

"For the love of Mike, what are you talking about?" demanded Elizabeth.

"Elizabeth!" exclaimed Miss Norton excitedly. "I believe it's a plot!"

"What's a plot? Of course it's a plot," replied Elizabeth. "Every picture has a plot."

"I'm not talking about the picture," protested her friend.

The next moment the indignation of people near by was manifested in no uncertain ways, and the two women were compelled to wait until the end before the mystery was revealed by Miss Norton.

"Listen to this," continued Miss Norton as they reached the street. "Of course I may be mistaken, but I'll bet my wrist-watch I'm not—after all you have told me about this Foster. A few days ago I was waiting for a number on the telephone. The operator put me on a busy wire, and

I heard a conversation that struck me as strange at the time, but, having no personal interest in it, I would never have thought of it again if you hadn't mentioned Chadworth's. From the conversation, it seems that there was some sort of a put-up job. One man was leaving for St. Louis that afternoon, and he was saying good-by to the other. I remember distinctly that the one living in New York told him just what the hero told the heroine, 'Be sure you write the letter at once; it's very important.' Only he said a lot more than that—something about he had to have the promotion or he would go under—that he had been losing a lot of money at the table—whatever that meant—"

"Cards!" supplied Elizabeth.

"And," continued Miss Norton, "that the fellow who was leaving must be sure it was written on Chadworth's paper—that that would do the trick, else he was much mistaken, for all he had to do was to flash the letter in front of the old man. Well," concluded Miss Norton triumphantly, "what do you think of it? It looks to me as if your friend Foster is a bad egg."

Elizabeth had been listening intently. Much to her friend's surprise, however, she did not become greatly excited over the "revelation."

"He might be—and then again, he might not."

"It's as plain as two and two to me," insisted her friend.

"Circumstantially, yes," said Elizabeth. "But many an innocent man has been condemned unjustly through circumstantial evidence. I can hardly believe Mr. Clark could make such a mistake in his estimate of Foster. I am sure he doesn't play cards at all. Why, he is the most careful man about everything being honorable. Mr. Clark wouldn't employ him if he were a gambler."

"How's Mr. Clark to know whether he gambles or not?" insisted Miss Norton.

"He has a way of finding out things," replied Elizabeth.

"Well, how do you account for this phone conversation fitting in with your case?"

"I can't account for it. I'll admit it

looks suspicious, but no doubt there is some explanation—if we knew the rest. You didn't hear any names but Chadworth's mentioned, did you?"

"No. I got my number before they finished talking."

"Then we haven't anything to go on except their talking about a letter, a promotion, and card playing. Perhaps the man from St. Louis was Chadworth himself."

"No, I am sure he wasn't, for, come to think of it, he said that he was leaving that afternoon, for he had finished his 'buying.'"

"A buyer!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "You are sure of that? Then, since the man wasn't one of the heads of the firm—"

"I'd look into that phone conversation," suggested Miss Norton.

"See here, Mary Norton, how under the sun am I to look into a telephone talk?"

"I don't know, but I'd do it somehow! I wouldn't let that man outwit me. You'll find out he's the guilty party all right."

When Elizabeth went to bed that night she could not sleep for a long time, thinking over the Foster affair. Could the man have resorted to such an underhand method of securing the position she had wanted? At last she concluded that such a thing was impossible.

The next morning she was convinced she should be ashamed of herself for misjudging Foster, for he came over to her with a smile and said:

"I have kept my promise. The letter to Chadworth's is on the way. We ought to receive a prompt reply—say in six days—that will allow plenty of time."

Elizabeth thanked him, and determined to think no more of the telephone conversation, but that proved to be not so easy as it seemed.

When the six days had elapsed Foster came to her, and in a sympathetic voice said:

"Too bad, Miss Woods, but the letter from Chadworth's came this morning. I know how disappointed you will be when you hear that they have already engaged a man for the position."

As he spoke, Elizabeth noticed a letter in his hand, which he glanced at but did

not offer to let her read. However, she saw very plainly the firm's name, "Chadworth & Co.," on the corner.

She suppressed her disappointment as much as possible and went about her work as usual. Only three days remained before Foster was to step into the position of assistant manager.

That evening she accepted an invitation to dine with an old suitor who knew of Foster's pursuit of her.

"I'm glad of one thing, Betty," he said; "that you didn't fall for that fellow Foster. He is not what he seems. I was downtown the other night showing our little village to some fellows who are in New York for a few days and expected me personally to conduct them through the slums—and who should we see in one of the gambling places but your former adorer, Foster. He was losing like the dickens and swearing like a trooper. I don't see how that fellow can afford to gamble on the salary he makes. He must spend it all on the cards, if he does that sort of thing often. Of course, that may have been the one time in a year. At any rate, I saw him."

"Did he see you?" asked Elizabeth.

"No."

"Then it's all right."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Elizabeth, "only I'm really glad he didn't know you saw him."

"It wouldn't have made any difference, anyhow," said her host. "I never met him but once. No doubt, he wouldn't even remember me."

That settled it!

The fact that Foster had been seen gambling one time was all Elizabeth wanted to know. The telephone conversation heard by Mary Norton became more and more convincing, and she puzzled her brain to find a plan by which she could learn the truth in regard to it.

"I've got to find out," she told herself, "even if I turn private detective to do so. They say 'all's fair in love and war.' Well, it's just as fair in business when you've got good cause."

Bits of the conversation she had had with Mamie Simons recurred to her—talk

about a woman being able to outwit a man—then the pat term, "watchful waiting."

"I'll do a little watchful waiting of my own, and we shall see who wins out in this game, Mr. Henry Foster. You think you've put me on the toboggan slide to the exit, but maybe you'll change your mind."

The more Elizabeth thought about the matter, the madder she became. The idea of a man resorting to such underhand schemes to help himself to the promotion which was hers by every right made her furious. She determined to have no mercy on him.

"He didn't have mercy on me!" she said to herself as her conscience argued against revenge. "He wanted the promotion to pay his gambling debts, while I need it to support a family."

Thus armed as to the justice of her cause, she proceeded with the ways and means of showing one Foster that a woman could look out for herself in a department store.

The first idea that entered her mind was to go straight to Mr. Clark and tell him the whole story, but she abandoned that plan, for when it came to facts she had none, except that Foster had been seen playing cards. The telephone conversation proved nothing, for it was only something some one else had heard. Foster could easily dismiss it as a mistake. In both the card and telephone evidence Elizabeth would be compelled to depend upon second-hand information. It was necessary that she herself find definite proof.

Suddenly an inspiration came to her.

"The very thing!" she exclaimed as she began looking for letter paper. "I'll do it!"

In a few minutes she had composed the following:

MR. R. L. CHADWORTH:

Dear Sir—I understand that you recently offered the position of assistant manager of Chadworth & Co., to Mr. Henry Foster, of Clark & Co., New York, and that Mr. Foster was unable to accept the position because of an advancement with Clark & Co. If the position with Chadworth & Co. is still open, I should like to be considered for it. I can refer you to Clark & Co., by whom I am employed at present.

There was a smile of satisfaction on Elizabeth's face as she signed, sealed and posted the letter, which she took pains to mark "Personal."

Then came the anxious waiting for the reply.

Foster, in the mean time, had ascended to his new position and was as polite and sentimentally insinuating as ever.

Elizabeth allowed no change in her own manner to be seen and went about the store, smiling and chatting with the customers, as if she hadn't a care on earth, much less keeping the lid on a mine which she hoped to be able to explode.

At last the expected letter arrived.

Yes, there was the same printing of the firm name in the corner that she had noticed on the letter Foster had.

Just as Elizabeth was about to open the flap Foster himself stopped to speak to her.

His eye quickly caught sight of the envelope.

He gave a start of surprise.

"Pardon me," he said, "but that is from Chadworth's, I see."

"Yes," replied Elizabeth. "It is from Chadworth's."

"I—I—" hesitated Foster, "didn't know you knew any one with the firm."

"I don't," she replied coolly.

Foster glanced from the letter to Elizabeth and back again. He was consumed with curiosity, but after standing there a few minutes and finding that she made no attempt to read the letter while he remained he walked away.

Elizabeth then drew the sheet from the envelope and hastily ran over the contents of the letter.

What she read caused her cheeks to flush and her eyes to shine with excitement. However, finding that Foster was stealthily watching her from a distance, though pretending to be talking with a customer, she replaced the letter in the envelope and busied herself with store matters.

At last, when sure that Foster had gone, she took up the telephone and asked for Mr. Clark himself.

"May I see you for five minutes? It's very important," she explained.

The head of the firm told her to call at his office at once.

"Mr. Clark," began Elizabeth, "I have hesitated about coming to you with this matter, but I feel I owe it to myself to do so."

"What is the trouble, Miss Woods?" asked Mr. Clark kindly. "Some difficult customer again?"

"Oh, no—it's about that promotion."

"The promotion? Oh, you were wondering when you will receive yours? I see. I should say in another week."

"It isn't my promotion—and then again—it is—only it is Foster's."

Elizabeth was becoming hopelessly muddled.

"Explain yourself, Miss Woods," said Mr. Clark, noticing how nervous she was. "Take your time. I have fifteen minutes to spare."

"It's—it's—a very delicate matter—I hardly know how to tell you. It's about Mr. Foster and myself."

A light began to dawn on Mr. Clark. He smiled.

"I think I understand, Miss Woods," he said as he recalled certain rumors that had come to him. "Perhaps you want to tell me that now that Mr. Foster has his promotion, you have decided to get married."

Elizabeth uttered a little cry of dismay.

"Oh, nothing like that!" she cried indignantly, her face flushing still more. "Why, I wouldn't marry a man who gambles, Mr. Clark!"

There! She had said it even before she expected to.

"Gambles? Foster gambles?" There was a note of disbelief in Mr. Clark's voice.

"I didn't mean to tell you that first," said Elizabeth. "Please don't think me a meddler, or one of those 'get even' kind, but I just had to look out for myself. Read this."

She handed him the letter.

MISS ELIZABETH WOODS,
CLARK & Co.,

Dear Madam—In reply to your letter of recent date, there is some mistake about Mr. R. L. Chadworth having offered the position you mention to Mr. Henry Foster. Mr. Chadworth has been in France for the past

six months and there has been no vacancy in the position of assistant manager with this firm, nor will there be at any time soon, as our present employee is giving full satisfaction.

The letter was signed by a member of the firm.

Mr. Clark looked in amazement at Elizabeth.

"Why, what does this mean?" he asked. "Tell me everything."

Then Elizabeth told him all about the telephone conversation heard by accident by her friend, Mary Norton; how she had refused to believe Foster guilty; then of the damaging proof brought by the old friend who had seen Foster gambling.

As she spoke, Mr. Clark's face became redder and redder.

"To think how that man has imposed on my confidence!" he exclaimed. "I thought him a model for the other clerks!"

"I'm sorry to do this, Mr. Clark," said Elizabeth, "but I felt that I was justified in finding out the truth, since Mr. Foster had not spared me and had lied and tricked me out of my promised promotion."

"Well, we will see about it!" said Mr. Clark as Elizabeth was about to go. "Stay right here, Miss Woods. We will settle the matter at once."

He pressed a buzzer, and in a few minutes it was answered by Foster, who entered with a deferential smile on his face. There was an instantaneous change of expression, however, when he caught sight of Elizabeth.

Mr. Clark held the Chadworth letter in his hand.

"Read this," he said to Foster, whose fingers trembled as he took it.

"Well! What have you to say?" demanded Mr. Clark in a stern voice.

"Nothing," Foster managed to stammer.

"Then it was all a put-up job to do Miss Woods out of her promotion?"

Foster hung his head.

"And you are a gambler besides!"

"That's been the whole trouble, Mr. Clark," Foster confessed. "I began playing a little and then I played more as I lost money. But the last time I swore off from cards for good. I wouldn't have pulled against Miss Woods's chances for the promotion if it hadn't been that I got in a hole and had to have the money. I didn't see much harm in pretending to receive an offer from Chadworth's by getting a friend to write me a letter on Chadworth's paper, since I knew that my work here had always given satisfaction and that I had earned a promotion."

"But I had told you that I expected to give Miss Woods the place," said Mr. Clark.

"I thought maybe she would marry me, and then she wouldn't have to work at all," replied Foster lamely.

"Oh!" exclaimed Elizabeth indignantly. "You knew that I never would."

"Well, Foster, your services with Clark & Co. are at an end. You can leave at once with two weeks salary in advance."

The last straw of all was added to Foster's cup of unhappiness when Mr. Clark said to Elizabeth:

"Miss Woods, begin your duties as our assistant manager to-morrow morning."



This is the 135th Novel, Originally Printed Serially in this Magazine, to be Published in Book Form

PRAIRIE FLOWERS

BY JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "The Gold Girl," "The Gun Brand," "The One Big Thing," etc.

(A Sequel to "The Texan")

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Bismillah

by



Achmed Abdullah

Author of "Backing the Tiger," "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms," "A Buccaneer in Spats," etc.

(A DONACHIE AND DAUD STORY)

CHAPTER I.

DOUBLE-DEE.

FOR a moment the unexpected sight of Baron Adrien de Roubaix, gold-handled snakewood cane crooked from elbow, dainty buttonniere in his lapel, featherweight Shetland tweeds emphatically outlining his portly Flemish curves, green-lined cork helmet throwing a thick, inky shadow over his bulbous forehead and down the length of his hawkish, predatory nose, monogrammed Turkish cigarette in three and a half inches of jade holder peaking up at a truculent angle from the left corner of his ruddy-mustached lips, and strolling down the main street of this fetid, fever-scabbed West African coast town with the same rather arrogant, rather supercilious ease as he would in his native Brussels on a walk from stock exchange to café or from his cigar-flavored, mahogany-wainscoted counting-house to his pretentious, neo-Gothic residence in the Rue Van Artevelde—for a moment the unexpected sight of Baron Adrien de Roubaix threw Mahmoud Ali Daud off his guard and conquered in him the long habit of outward self-control acquired by a lifetime of special training.

"Allah kureem!" he muttered under his breath, rapidly snapping his lean, brown fingers to ward off the little hunch-backed

jinnee of misfortune. Not that he was a superstitious man; but, being a Moslem, he was a Jesuitical opportunist in spiritual as well as in worldly affairs, and while on the one hand he believed neither in the jinnee nor in this hand-snapping method of protecting one's self against them, he believed on the other hand that there could be no harm in being careful.

So he snapped his fingers again—they cracked through the dull, heat-pregnant air like pistol-shots—and stood still. His keen, dark, aquiline face was marked by a look of almost alarmed inquiry. Then, seeing the glint of oblique, malign amusement in the other's washed-out blue eyes, he greeted him with his usual faintly ironic suavity of manner.

"Good morning, baron." The Arab's French was faultless.

"Oh—ah—good morning—" came the reply with a negligent drawl.

It was the opposite of friendly eagerness. Negligent, too, was the man's way of poisoning himself lightly, for all his well-fleshed bulk, on the ball of his left foot, the toes of the right just brushing the ground, about to walk on, as if he had not noticed Mahmoud Ali Daud until the latter had addressed him; as if even now it bored him to stop and converse.

The Arab flushed. His hands opened and

shut spasmodically; they searched, almost automatically, for the jeweled hilt of the short, broad-bladed dagger that was hiding its deadly soul in the crimson, voluminous folds of his waist shawl. He felt hurt in his thin-skinned Semite pride. Rash words of ever ready invective crowded on his lips. But, with an effort, he choked them back.

Business! he thought—thought of James Donachie, his dour Scotch-American partner, with his frequent, monotonous sermon—to the point fully as often as not—that business is business, and not a matter of personal sympathies or antipathies; that business demands the cool hand, the cool head, the cool, purring words—

Mahmoud Ali Daud changed his scowl into a lopsided smile.

"When did you arrive, baron?" he went on. "I had no idea that the Woermann liner had already—"

He looked out to sea where brilliant wedges of sunlight, filtering through the lacy finials of the palm-trees, misted the waves with golden gauze. There was no ship in the open roadstead except a weather-beaten Norwegian tramp wallowing drunkenly to both sea anchors and, far out, the slim, coquettish silhouette of a French gunboat. "I did not know that the—"

The baron's gurgling, guttural laugh drowned the tail-end of the question and rumbled into words that, indeed, the Woermann liner would not show her house flag for at least another week.

"We passed her six hundred miles north," he continued, "down the Moroccan coast—and she's taking off and putting on freight at every stinking little port. Don't be impatient, Daud. She'll lurch in *some* day. What's the matter? Expecting important mail?"

"No. But how did you—"

"Inquisitive beggar, aren't you? Well—curiosity is one of your racial characteristics. Look yonder!" And he took the Arab by the arm and flung a thumb to the southwest, where the sun laid a shining ribbon from point to point of a land-locked bay, not big enough nor deep enough to give anchorage to the large liners and tramps, but providing plenty of snug, safe harbor

for the little white-painted craft that etched its trim gear and graceful, crimson-rimmed smoke-stacks and ventilators against the dazzling, amethyst-colored cliffs.

"Oh"—the Arab drew in his breath—"you—"

"Right. I came down in the company's yacht."

"In a hurry, were you?"

"Perhaps."

The Belgian smiled softly, and the Arab looked at him, worried, intrigued, rather nervous.

"Why didn't you cable us?" he demanded. "I might not have been here—nor Donachie. Not that our terms have changed the least little bit," he added, "but—"

"I didn't come here to see you or your partner."

"No? On a pleasure trip, are you?"

"Why—yes. Business is pleasure, my friend," laughed the baron. "Big business! The biggest pleasure in the world! You know that, don't you?" And he went on, with sharp, sudden emphasis, "Special business! Business dealing with—oh—shall we say a plum-colored, heathenish African king's ransom in gold-dust and rubber and ivory? A goodish section of this sweating, miasmatic continent begging for the wares and the protection of the Chartered Company?"

"Or of Donachie & Daud!" suggested the other.

Baron de Roubaix smiled.

"Dead men tell no tales," he said, "and dead men cannot trade."

"You"—the Arab was excited—"you have heard—"

"Who hasn't by this time? Why—there isn't a kraal in the whole of Africa that hasn't heard the news. My very office-boys, back home in Brussels, whisper about it, and speculate. Oh—but you are ingenious, my little Daud!"

The baron talked in a flat, drawling voice—a voice, thought the Arab, different from the hectic, chopped, hacked, imploring accents with which he had spoken to him a few months earlier when he had faced the Belgian in the Brussels headquarters of the Continental Chartered Company, behind

the ground-glass door with the gold-stenciled legend:

M. LE BARON ADRIEN JACQUES MARIE DE ROUBAIX

Governor-General and Chairman of the Board of Directors

PRIVATE

Somehow, that day in the baron's office had marked the apex of Mahmoud Ali Daud's career. Twenty years back, at the time when the Chartered Company had tremendously expanded with the help of French and Belgian capital and had begun to throw its gold-baited nets all the way from Morocco to the Cape, north to Timbaktu and southeast to the giant swirl of the Murchison Falls, the Arab, then a trade-station inspector for the company, had been dismissed to make room for some younger son whose father had invested twenty thousand pounds in the company stock.

Almost immediately a toss of the dice of Fate had thrown together—in some stinking Congo settlement—him and his future partner: the latter, James Donachie, whose dour Scots blood had been but imperfectly tempered by the fact that he had been born and bred in Chicago, and himself, Mahmoud Ali Daud, the grave, dark, sloe-eyed Arab from Damascus.

Strange bed-fellows!

For the one was a Scot of the Scots, rigidly Presbyterian, hard-headed and hard-souled, but suffused with an incongruous, sentimental Celtic mysticism that often caused him to look below the practical surface of practical things and conditions and to stay the weight of his hand even at a loss to himself. Narrow where his own and broad where other people's morals were concerned, demanding each penny in the pound less for avarice than because of the principle involved, and, furthermore, a man whose Glasgow ancestors had contributed innumerable divines to the Kirk since the days of John Knox; while the other, a pure-bred son of the al-Ansari tribe, a noble race, kin to the Prophet Mohammed, who for over twelve hundred years had been the hereditary keepers of the keys of the sacred

Kaba Mosque, was Arab in everything: greedy, and yet generous; well-mannered, and yet overbearing; sincere, and yet sneering; sympathetic to his friends, and incredibly cruel to his enemies; austere, and yet passionate; simple, and yet complex.

And—partners!

"Donachie & Daud"—shortened generally into Double-Dee—their firm, from small beginnings, was now known from the Cape to the Congo, and up through the brooding hinterland, the length of the great, sluggish river, even as far as the black felt tents of the Touaregs. It had made history in African commerce. It was respected in Paris and London and New York, feared in Brussels and Amsterdam, envied in Hamburg and Berlin.

Donachie & Daud traded in ivory and ostrich feathers and rubber, in gold and beads, in calico and gum-copal and quinin and orchilla roots, in Canadian canoes and tiny, tight American motor launches, in cotton and oil and tobacco, and—if the truth be told—in grinning, heathenish jujû idols manufactured in Birmingham by a firm of devout Baptists, cases of cheap Liverpool gin, and the sort of rifles guaranteed to explode at the first discharge which the Congolese Arabs call the "mothers of bel-lowing."

Two decades of hard, hard up-hill pull and work—work in this black, fetid land of Africa which gives riotously of its treasure, and which maims and squeezes and kills even while it gives! Two decades, apart occasional business trips to England, France, Morocco, or the Cape, spent on the west coast and up the miasmatic hinterland where, to quote Sir Charles Lane-Fox, governor of the colony, the cemeteries were the only thriving white settlements!

Two decades of gruelling, heart-breaking competition against the great Chartered Company that had a king for main shareholder, a prime minister for chief counsel, a bishop for secretary, a Hebrew banker with a historical name for treasurer, and whose agents and factors and explorers were the picked and reckless spirits of all the seven seas, keen, clever, unscrupulous: down-East Yankees, north-country Englishmen, Brazilian Jews, Portuguese half-

breeds, Arabs, Welshmen, Sicilians, Armenians, and Glasgow Scots.

But Double-Dee had succeeded; against tremendous odds.

To-day, all the way up the river, their factories and wharves, their stations and warehouses, proclaimed their insolent wealth. They ran their own line of paddle-steamers as far as the Falls; they had their own dry-docks and repair-shops; twice a year they chartered fast, expensive turbine boats to carry precious cargo to Liverpool and Antwerp and even direct to New York. They had their fingers in every African financial or commercial pie.

Years earlier they could have retired from business; Donachie to a brick-and-stone realization of the Chicago Lake Shore Drive palace about which his imagination wove nostalgic dreams on those choking days when, outside, the sun-rays dropped down like crackling spears while, inside, behind closed rattan shutters and the velvet pun-kah going at top speed, the heat was like a woollen blanket; and Mahmoud Ali Daud to his pleasant Damascus villa gleaming like a jewel in its setting of rose-bushes and the flaunting garden with the ten varieties of date-trees of which he talked so much.

They spoke of it—retirement from business, home—with longing in their voices. They quarreled about it, cursed each other about it, year after year.

But they remained, year after year. For this was Africa. The cloying, subtle poison of it had entered their souls. It was like a drug. They could not do without it.

There was always something new waiting for them, behind the ranges, the rivers, the whirling, swirling falls, the jungles, and the forests; something new to be discovered, explored, tamed, exploited, colonized—

"Africa," the Arab would say and thereby greatly shock his Scotch partner, "a passionate mistress she, but clever—Allah! Allahu!—as clever as Shaitan, the cursed, the stoned, the father of lies and fleas! Always withholding the full sweetness of her kiss, the full thrill of her embrace—always luring on, on!"

One day there would be a clicking, grunting whisper in the kraals of a virgin ground of ivory caches above the last bush station

of the Grand L'Popo Basin; another day there would be florid, metaphorical talk brought by an Arab runner, drunk with hemp, of an incredible store of gold-dust, the plunder of the swinging, heathen centuries, in some jungly village near the Bight; or, perhaps, the night drums would throb forth the tale of a new find of rubber beyond Kimbedi.

Then the Chartered Company would be after it, and so of course—"wolf running side by side with gray wolf," was Mahmoud Ali Daud's comment—would be Double-Dee. Victory swinging her ironic pendulum—throwing the flash and thrall of the red gold into the lap of the one or the other; to-day causing the frock-coated, silk-hatted gentry in Brussels to smile and rub their palm, and to-morrow causing the Arab to give sonorous thanks to Allah and the Prophet while his Presbyterian partner would look on with a strange, but typical mixture of financial satisfaction and spiritual disapproval.

Then finally some months earlier, had come the apex of Donachie & Daud's career—a double apex and, by the same token, a double triumph, conceived—logically, properly, since this *was* Africa—in the lap of hazard and mad chance and leering, hiccuping coincidence.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN FROM THE FAR PLACES.

FOR, one sultry night, out of the jungle, naked but for a crimson-fringed Galla blanket, his face and body burnt the color of age-darkened mahogany, bearded to below his chest with a thick, ruddy-gold, matted beard, a grisly collection of voodoo charms about his ankles, had come a white man—rather the fantastic semblance of a white man.

He had walked stealthily, with the suspicious tread of the jungle-bred, slinking like a dingo-dog past the few, scattered residences of the European settlers, avoiding the pretentious double row of electric lights that swept up to the governor's corrugated-iron mansion, passing at a run the red brick church of the Jesuit Fathers, hugging close

the coiling, trooping shadows of a clump of carob trees as, suddenly, a square, yellow glare cleft the darkness, and subaltern Johnny Mortimer of the Haussa Gunners swaggered out of the officers' mess-room, and finally coming to rest in the back parlor of the Grand Hotel, owned by Leopoldo de Lisboa de Sousa, a west coast Portuguese, whose presence in the colony was a continuous thorn in the side of all the respectable whites and most of the respectable blacks in the little port settlement.

It was an open secret that De Sousa had committed every crime on the rather comprehensive African calendar, from slave-dealing to gun-running, from illicit diamond-buying to other less mentionable felonies closely connected with the Quartier St. Jacques of Marseilles. But he was as slippery as an eel. He had never been caught; and the standing reward of a thousand pounds, offered by Sir Charles Lane-Fox, the governor of the colony, from his large, private fortune for any information sufficient to jail De Sousa for a term of not less than five years, still remained unclaimed, though many were the traps laid for the hotel-keeper's wary feet.

The night was heavy and thick; the sour smell of fever was in the air, keeping all the world within the snug shelter of wall and roof; and nobody had seen the blanketed, bearded figure creep out of the jungle, nobody had seen him enter the back parlor of the Grand Hotel, had there heard him buy food and drink and opium and silence from De Sousa with a couple of large, uncut diamonds drawn from a leopard-skin pouch, except one M'Kindi.

He was a wizen, tattooed, flat-faced Balolo from beyond the Yellala Falls, an outcaste from his tribe, who, for decidedly unsavory reasons, for reasons the tale of which has not yet been written, for reasons furthermore, which James Donachie, so as to save his peculiar Scotch conscience, refused to know, was bound hand and foot to the latter's partner and used by him as a spy, a listener, a gatherer of subterranean information.

Three minutes after the jungle man had entered the hotel, M'Kindi bowed low, with outstretched hands, before Mahmoud Ali

Daud in his great living-room which was as typically Arab as if he had never left his native town of Damascus. For there was a polished expanse of mosaic marble under foot, cut everywhere by small, silken, yielding Persian rugs; in the corners stood tall candlesticks of gilded wood with huge candles of saffron-colored, spikenard-perfumed wax; the high dado of tiles on the walls was softly luminous with nacreous-blue and peacock-green and dull, burnt orange; the dwarf windows, high up, were darkened by reed blinds; and there was no furniture except a *mastabha*, a long, low, carpeted platform heaped with pillows and shadowed by a brattice screen of ancient Moorish stucco work, an immense, turquoise-studded water-pipe, and a carved, inlaid palm wood table with the more intimate of the Arab's belongings: a basketed bottle of holy Zemzem water, coffee-cups in engraved brass holders, perfumery-bottles, a stray book or two, a traveling Koran in crimson, pliant Bokhara leather, and a magnificent, black-and-gold turban cloth which coiled about the table like a snake.

Daud raised his eyelids that were slightly reddened with hasheesh, as M'Kindi slid through the room on silent, unclean feet, then squatted on his flat heels, lifting one withered, plum-colored paw and giving ceremonious greetings:

"My life is in the hollow of thine hand, O Inkos! Thy heart is indeed my aim and my contentment!"—a salutation which usually tended to precede a maudlin demand for money, tobacco, or drugs.

Thus small blame to the Arab that, instead of returning greetings, he snarled blood-curling threats of the many and extremely painful things that would happen to the Balolo if he did not immediately remove his "abominable and most odorous shadow" from the room and indicated, significantly, the sjambok of pickled hippohide which lay convenient to his hand; but he sat up straight and a gleam came into his eyes when the other neither fawned nor asked for money, but poured forth a stream of clicking, grunting Bantu words, winding up with:

"Even now, O Inkos, he is with the Portuguese, eating opium as a goat licks

salt—and a great fear is in his bones—and the diamonds—”

“Is it the truth, great and uncouth cock-roach?” asked Daud.

“It is! By my mother’s honor!”

“Bah—thy mother’s honor—which was, belike, thy father’s dishonor! Thy mother’s—aughr!”—Daud spat—“may pigs defile her grave!” His lean, brown, steely hand gripped the Balolo’s bony shoulder and squeezed unmercifully. “Is it the truth—tell me, O whelp of thy mother’s breeding—and not a dog’s trick to—”

“It is the truth—the truth!” came the negro’s agonized protest, and something in the man’s accents, in the flash and roll of his popping white eyeballs, convinced the Arab who released his grip and pointed to the door with his thumb, on which shone a great star sapphire in a hammered lead setting.

“Go back to the hotel,” he said, “and watch. I shall follow presently.”

“But—Inkos!” wheedled the Balolo.

“Well?”

“Thou knowest—I am a poor man—my children are starving—”

“*Ya Malhut!* Have I ever forgotten to pay—in friendship or in hatred—in reward or revenge—in good deed or bad? Go, thou M’Kindi! Go in peace. Thine shall be a shining reward if, belike, thy tale be true.”

And the Balolo was out of the house and away into the sweating, purple night, while Mahmoud Ali Daud slipped a Webley automatic into his waist-shawl, fastened the thong of the sjambok about his wrist, twisted the turban around his shaven head with a few rapid turns, and wrapped himself in the earth-brown folds of his voluminous, woolen burnoose. He seemed to hesitate a moment, then entered the next room, his partner’s, which the latter had made as homelike as possible with the help of Grand Rapids furniture, a large square—to the Arab’s never-ending, sardonic amusement, since frequently he had offered him the pick of his own collection of choice Persian and Turkoman rugs—of blue-and-gray, machine-made Axminster carpet, a map of the United States, a framed picture of Theodore Roosevelt, with months-old numbers of

American magazines lying about and a few tattered volumes of Robert Burns’s and Lady Nairn’s poems to give a Scots tang to the atmosphere.

He looked up as the other entered, and smiled.

They were as far apart as the poles, these two men, in race and education, in ambitions and aspirations, in ideals and morals, in religion and ethics. But they were the best of friends, the most loyal of partners, even though, at times, the language they used to each other seemed to give the lie to the statement.

James Donachie surveyed his friend from head to foot and winked a chilly blue eye.

“Where are you off to this time o’ night,” he asked, “arrayed like Solomon, the King of the Jews, in all his glory?”

The Arab smiled. His friend’s Presbyterian fear of beauty and luxury, in the abstract or the concrete, had never ceased to amuse him, and he used every opportunity to lead him on.

“I am off to see somebody who”—he coughed gently—“ah—somebody who has come back from the far places. And my heart is tight at the thought.”

“That’s just what I imagined,” came Donachie’s ironic grumble. “King Solomon indeed! What does it say in the Song of Songs? ‘Thou art black but comely!’ Mahmoud, my lad, your morals are wretched and heathen—and some day you’ll get five inches of steel between your ribs—and then I’ll have to look round for a new partner, and I’ll be careful to pick some one who isn’t as fond of the ladies as—”

“*Aywah!*” cut in the Arab with a hooting bellow of laughter. “It is your imagination, O great Scotch buffalo, which is at fault, and not my morals—which are the whitest this side of Mecca! It is a man who has come back from the far places, and not a woman! It is a man at whose thought my heart is tight. And his name is”—he paused, then, sure of the sensation he was going to cause, gave to his words the emphasis of a suddenly lowered voice—“his name is Darwaysh Ukkhab!”

“Darwaysh Uk—” Donachie jumped up. “You don’t mean to say that—it isn’t possible—it isn’t credible—oh—”

"Everything is possible to Fate the which is Allah's immutable will!" came the Arab's slightly hypocritical rejoinder; then, a practical man of the world once more: "M'Kindi told me. He saw him enter the back parlor of the Grand Hotel, heard him hold whispered converse with that Portuguese father of piglings, saw him take great diamonds from his pouch—diamonds—you know the old tale, little brother!"

"Yes, yes. But M'Kindi may have lied."

"He had no reason to."

"But—why should he have told you, instead of turning the information to his personal benefit?"

"Because it meant nothing to him. He does not even know the Darwaysh's name."

"Then—how—"

"How do I know?" smiled Mahmoud Ali Daud. "M'Kindi described him. There is no mistaking Darwaysh Ukkhab. M'Kindi saw him—saw the diamonds—and brought me his report. After all, that dog of a Balolo is on Double-Dee's pay-roll—"

"Aye! But under the rubric marked 'Mahmoud Ali Daud—private account.'"

The Arab laughed good naturedly.

"Careful man!" he said. "But, anyway, the Darwaysh is here, for a reason yet to be discovered, yet to be twisted to the benefit of our purses, partner mine, and to be made to smell most evilly in the nostrils of the Chartered Company. You know that the Darwaysh—"

"You believe the tales are true?"

"Believe? How can I doubt the stony fact of it, heart of my heart? There was never one, these many years, of our own men nor of the Chartered Company, could get the proper twist and password of the trade up in the Waranga country, though our wares are good and honestly priced, though there is rubber up there and the warm, red trickle of gold-dust and enough ivory to fill seventeen times seventeen laps of greed."

"I know," cut in the other, disagreeably. "But to whose profit?"

"The Darwaysh's and half a dozen stinking Waranga chiefs', and never an attempt at proper organization and proper trade! It is Darwaysh Ukkhab rules up there—always the Darwaysh, for some hidden reason

—and it is his matted, yellow beard which is the great juju of the outer kraals—*Allah kureem!*"

"But—why does he—how—"

"How am I to know, little brother? Only the fact of it remains—the fact that, up yonder, his word is law and his gesture a command. And now it seems that he is here, slinking into town in the thick of night like a dog that has been well beaten with thorn-sticks—and afraid of—"

"What?"

"What indeed? I tell you, heart o' me, here is the final chance of Double-Dee—a sweeping expanse of virgin soil to be exploited—and as for the Chartered Company—*wah!*" He snapped his fingers desisively.

"Maybe you're right." The other rose. "No harm in trying at all events. I'll come with you, Mahmoud."

"No. I shall go alone. Remember, there are certain bonds that hold Darwaysh Ukkhab tight and fast to the sweep of my sword-arm and the clear-ringing metal of my soul—certain bonds whose strength I would have tested before, had I ever had the opportunity of coming face to face with him up there in the Waranga country. And as to Leopoldo de Sousa"—he paused, chuckled reminiscently, and went on—"he, too—"

"I don't care to know, Mahmoud, what unholy bond there is between you and that Portuguese rogue. I do not altogether approve of some of your methods, you know."

"Then stay here, O man blessed in the sweet scent of your own righteousness!"

And the Arab smiled affectionately at the Scot, who smiled back.

CHAPTER III.

NAVARRO D'ALBANI.

TEN minutes later, in his stockinged feet, his yellow leather *babouche* slippers in his hand, Mahmoud Ali Daud stepped noiselessly on the back veranda of the Grand Hotel; then, as the great steel hilt of his dagger scraped crackingly against the stucco wall, he raised his sjambok and brought it down, with the full strength of

his lean, muscular arm, on the kinky head of the Galla house-boy, the night watchman, who had loomed up from somewhere out of the dark at the sound. The man dropped with a guttural sob of pain, immediately scotched into breathless silence, as he heard the Arab's low, even, passionless voice:

"Be quiet, dog and son of many dogs. Be quiet, nameless thing without morals or pedigree. Or—"

Faintly the answering whisper brushed up from the ground as the Galla kissed the Arab's foot:

"My life in thy hand, O Inkos!"

"It is indeed! Here—lest thou forget it!" And even Donachie, who knew Africa, who knew the Arabs, and who especially knew his partner, would have been shocked could he have seen the latter again raise his sjambok and bring it down on the negro's unprotected head.

Without paying any further attention to the groveling house-boy, Mahmoud Ali Daud walked up to the locked back door and knocked at it imperiously. Twice he knocked; and, when no answer came, when there was no sound, no movement, no sign of life, nothing except the thick African night that folded about him like the slimy tentacles of some evil, half-fluid monster of the swamps and, far in the distance, the staccato thumping of a signal drum sending the coast gossip to the outer kraals, he drew his dagger, calmly inserted the broad blade between the door and the jamb, pushed, pressed, forced open—and jumped rapidly back as, out of the sudden orange glare from within, a knife whizzed past his right ear and buried itself inch-deep in the door.

The Arab smiled quizzically, and bowed with an ironic "*Salâam aleykhum.*"

"Is that the way to greet a friend?" he went on, his hand reaching neither for dagger nor automatic. "Chiefly"—and there was a minatory, feline purr in his words—"a friend such as I who holds your life by the string of his tongue? And, remember, it has been said that we Arabs are blessed with leaky, clever, twisting tongues, that we are babblers of babblings. And, perhaps, a little word of mine—flying on winged feet to the ear of the governor of the colony—"

He paused, and continued, "*Wah*, friend of my soul, you are rash and wanting in caution—and—"

"Peace, Mahmoud!" cut in the Portuguese whose right hand, which had thrown the knife, was still drawn back across the shoulder with the fingers crooked and slightly apart as if petrified in the act of speeding its sharp message that quivered in the door.

"Peace, indeed, Leopoldo of my soul!" replied the other; and he drew the door shut, stepped fully into the room and surveyed the scene in front of him with bright, mocking eyes—nor did it need a detective trained in analytical ratiocination to interpret it.

For, sprawled across the table, his bearded face buried in his arms, breathing stertorously, his lungs working with a heavy, staccato thump that caused the shoulders, from which the Galla blanket had slipped, to move rhythmically up and down, lay the stranger from the jungle whom M'Kindi had described. The acrid, sickening odor that filled the room gave silent testimony to the nature of the influence that had sent the man into such heavy slumber, and, "You do not know how to prepare a proper opium pill, my Leopoldo," smiled the Arab sarcastically. "You mix the poppy-juice too thoroughly, far too thoroughly, with the deadening juice of the asclepias plant."

"Well—" The Portuguese gave a short, shameless laugh. "I—"

"I know!" Daud indicated a pouch of leopard-skin with a handful, dozens and dozens of uncut, large-sized diamonds rolling from it, that must have dropped to the floor as the hotel-keeper, at the sound of the door bursting open, had thrown the knife.

"You are right," agreed the other, again smiling shamelessly, "there is the reason. And"—a greedy glint eddied up in his blue-black eyes—"they are mine—mine—I—"

"Wait!" Mahmoud Ali Daud picked up the stones, took two, gave them to De Sousa, returned the others to the pouch which he put back on the table. "That is enough for you."

"No, no, no! We split even! I was the first to—"

"Silence, dog!" broke in the Arab con-

temptuously. "I do not want any of these diamonds. I am stalking for bigger game—silence!" he thundered as the Portuguese tried to expostulate. "And"—suddenly he stared straight at the other—"remember, I am a babbler of babblings and the governor's very good friend. And so—tell me—the truth!"

"What?" The word came like the snarl of a wild-cat, afraid of the trainer's whip, more afraid of the trainer's stony, merciless, compelling eye.

"Do you know this man?"

"No."

The Arab took a step nearer. His eyes contracted to narrow slits. He thrust out his chin so that the short, well-cropped beard jutted out like a battering-ram. His nervous fingers toyed with the thong of the sjambok.

"Are you telling the truth?" he demanded.

"Yes, yes, yes!" There was no doubt now of the man's sincerity.

"How then," came the next rapid question, "did he happen to come to you?"

"I don't know. I only know that—he told me so!—he had heard of me—"

"Who hasn't—on the west coast?" came the sarcastic rejoinder.

"And—" continued De Sousa with rather a pleased smile at the Arab's interruption—"he offered me some of these stones if I would hide him here, get him clothes, and then smuggle him, unbeknown to all, aboard the first ship that made port. And—well—"

"I understand. You, being a dog without honor or faith or morals, thought it more profitable to drug the little, little opium pills with which he wanted to sooth his frayed nerves, and to rob him of all he has!"

"Naturally!" came the callous rejoinder.

"Naturally, indeed! A vulture back to the reek of carrion, and a dog back to the dung-heap! Go, now. This man is a friend of mine. I shall talk with him and attend to his wants. And—once more—remember my so distressingly leaky tongue. Remember that the governor is my friend. Remember that once, when the English fought the Bayakas, in the interior, I ran across a

certain Portuguese pig selling stolen rifles and ammunition to—"

"Yes, yes! I remember!" said the hotel-keeper with a crooked, nervous smile and left, while Mahmoud Ali Daud stood still for several minutes, listened close, opened the door suddenly to find out if De Sousa was eavesdropping, then returned to the table, where he busied himself over the drugged man with skilled hands, pressing the glassy eyeballs, rubbing the throat and neck, massaging the sinewy arms, pulling the fingers one by one, and working up and down the spine; until finally the man gave a deep, gurgling sob, sat up with a jerky start, blinked against the light, and, at once, burst into laughter and shook the other's hands with every indication of pleased surprise.

"Daud!" he cried. "Mahmoud Ali Daud!"

"Heart of my heart!"

The two embraced each other after the exaggerated manner of the Orient, hugging like wrestlers, blowing kisses into the air with the tips of their fingers, pressing cheek daintily against cheek and flat palm against flat palm, then holding each other at arm's length and beginning the whole process all over again, with evidently a great deal of relish; and, finally, they sat down, and the Arab having produced tobacco and cigarette-papers, they talked at length, reminiscently, with the little incongruous pauses, the little chokings of voice and heavy pulsings of heart, the sudden, queer, groping gestures of two men who read in each other the tale—the swing, the drama, the comedy, the splendid, shining, never-to-be-realized ambitions—of their past youth.

Nor, straight through, was it by the name of Darwaysh Ukkhab that the Arab addressed his friend, but by another name—limpid, soft, metallic, Latin—Navarro d'Albani! Heart of my dead youth! Navarro d'Albani!"

The other, smoothing his yellow, matted beard with his hand, laughed in his throat.

"Twenty years," he said, "since I've heard the name!"

"Thirty—thirty-one or two!" gently corrected Mahmoud.

"What difference? Years enough to have forgotten the very sound of it! But—by the God of Abraham and of Jacob—it does sound sweet!"

"*Ahee!*" sighed the Arab. "Sweet in the nostrils of memory!"

CHAPTER IV.

SHADOWS FROM THE PAST.

AND again reminiscences—the talk of the dead years—of the days when Navarro d'Albani, a Turkish Jew of ancient Moorish-Spanish descent, whose ancestors had occupied high seats of honor at Granada during the days of the Abencerage Caliphs, had followed the call of adventure in his own wild heart, and had gone to Egypt, thence to Tunis, the Sahara, the Soudan, deeper and deeper into the brooding heart of the Black Continent, keen and flushed with the enthusiasm of youth, thirsting for the spoil and color and thrill of the far places.

His life had been a fantastic, incredible odyssey, a twisted, scrolled page torn out of Africa's unwritten, never-to-be-written annals, and it had peaked acridly into blood and torture and slavery when the Mahdi swept out of the south to the gates of Egypt and blazed a crimson trail across the Soudan, with flame and torch and hangman's noose—and the Moslem priests' nasal incantations.

It was then that Navarro d'Albani, being an opportunist, had for safety's sake embraced Islam—little difference to him if he called his god Jehovah or Allah—including the brand-new name of Darwaysh Ukkhab. Even so, the Mahdi had never quite trusted that great, yellow beard of his and that coldly ironic eye and, for years, his life had swung by a gossamer thread.

Once he had been sentenced to death, the scarlet-cloaked Nubian executioner had already bared the two-handed sword graven with the name of Allah the All-Merciful—the which was not Moslem sarcasm, but Moslem piety—when, dressed rather foppishly in a pistache-and-lavender silk *djebba*, a voluminous *dulband* of orange-colored gauze twisted coquettishly

about his head, a sprig of wild basil stuck above his right ear, Mahmoud Ali Daud, then a youth of twenty who had but recently bidden farewell to his family in Damascus, had ridden into camp atop a slim, creamy-white dromedary, and followed by some ruffianly servant-retainers.

For some vague reason, psychological or—for Allah alone knows how, in the swing of the centuries, families that once were friends, have drifted apart to the far lands—perhaps atavistic, hereditary, reaching back to the days when the d'Albanis and the Dauds were both sitting beside the lion fountain in Granada's Alhambra and sipping their musk-scented coffee, Mahmoud had taken an immediate fancy to the other youth, and, secure in his spiritual position and privileges as a kinsman of the Prophet, had given imperious orders that his life be spared.

Hereafter, for years, the two had traded and fought and laughed and ridden and swaggered together, throughout north and Central Africa, until, one year, Navarro d'Albani had gone on a visit to his home in Smyrna. He had gone with a laugh on his lips. But he had returned to Africa, three months later, a changed man, weary, bitter, sardonic, hard, a confirmed cynic and misanthrope.

The rich sweetness of his soul had turned to vinegar, the honey of his words to gall, his love of mankind to brooding hatred. He had not vouchsafed an explanation, nor had the Arab, with the delicacy, perhaps the intuitive, almost feminine knowledge of the race of Shem, asked for one.

And then one day—and well Mahmoud Ali Daud remembered the scene, the house in Tunis where they lived at the time, with the covered portico of small Moorish arches, round like the horn of the crescent moon, upheld by slender pillars of rose marble, the tinkling fountain, the flaunting rose garden, and his friend jumping to his feet from his couch, the precious, jade-tipped pipe splintering on the ground, his great hands stabbing up and out, his yellow beard flinging to the breeze like a battle-flag—then one day his friend had cried out, suddenly, without warning or cause, that he was going away, into the heart of

Central Africa, that—he had sworn it, by the God of Abraham and of Jacob—never again did he want to see a white face, of Arab or European, of man or woman or child, that he would hereafter throw in his lot with the blacks.

"*Fantee!* I shall go, *Fantee!* I shall turn native!"

Deliberately! Not because of drugs or drink! There had been no arguing with him, no reasoning. And he had gone that same night, Africa had swallowed him—to appear, years later, in the reports that filtered through occasionally to the coast, as a legendary figure, a yellow-bearded white man whose word in the Waranga country was law, whose gesture was a command, whom the natives obeyed with superstitious awe, and who would let no white man enter the country which he ruled—France and England had not yet divided the whole hinterland into spheres of interest—though it was rich in gold and ivory and rubber and though many were the indirect offers made him both by independent traders and by the Chartered Company—

"Not even me," said the Arab with gentle reproach, "me, thy friend, wouldst thou allow to come face to face with thee these many years."

D'Albani smiled.

"Tell me," he asked. "Was it the memory of thy old friendship which made thee send messages to me back yonder, or perhaps—for thou *art* an Arab—thy greed for trade and the profit of trade?"

"I am an Arab and thou art a Jew," replied the other. "We understand each other. And"—with sweeping honesty—"it was both! Greed—and friendship. But, by Allah and by Allah, it was chiefly and foremost the latter, my friendship. I did want to see thee!"

"Remember—I had given an oath that—"

"That—yes, yes—that thou wouldst never want to see again a white face, of man or woman or child. But—now—here—" and the Arab's lean hand shot out eloquently.

"Now," replied the other, "it appears that my oath is broken and shivered, and

perhaps the God of Abraham and of Jacob will understand—and forgive. Now I am back among the whites. And"—his voice dropped, and he leaned across the table so that his face jutted into the full radiance of the lamp—"there is in my soul a great fear—and a great, sweet hope."

"Tell me!"

"The hope is—"

The Arab's hand cut mockingly through the sentence, and he laughed.

"I know the hope," he said. "A woman! The same woman who, years back, when thou hadst been home on a visit, changed thy heart and sent thee to the far places. That I guessed—long ago. A woman who—"

"Who trampled on my heart!"

"And who now again, somehow, across the dead years and the great distance, has called thee to her—"

"How dost thou know?"

"Am I a prattling babe *not* to know? Have there not been many soft, henna-stained feet that used my soul for a tasseled rug to step on—many little hands that twined about my foolish heart—Zoleikha and Ayesha and Nadja and Soltana and Zorah and— I have forgotten the names—but never the words. They were always the same—soft, silken, gliding, lying—"

He paused, smiled reminiscently, and went on:

"But the fear? What, little brother, is the fear which has sent thee here, slinking, furtive, in the dead of night, like a dog that has been well beaten with thorn sticks?"

"Mahmoud!" came the counter query. "Dost thou believe in"—d'Albani's voice trembled, shivered, peaked to a strange, eery note—"in evil influences—in witchcraft—in devils—"

The Arab did not look up. Nervously he fingered his amber rosary.

"My friend," he replied Jesuitically, "there are indeed—so the learned doctors of the Faith have told me—certain references, in the Koran as well as in the sacred Hadith, to devils—djinni. Even the great king of the Jews, Solomon the Magnificent, is said to have—"

"None of thy twisted Moslem hypocri-

sies! None of thy theological playings with words and thoughts! I am speaking—and well thou knowest that I do—of heathen devils—negro—oh—fetishes”—the voice dropped flatly—“juju—”

He was silent. So was the other. The mad, amazing stillness of Africa was all about them, like a sodden blanket, like a red mist, like a knife that cut through to their very hearts. Presently a rattan window screen flapped loose and whispered sardonically, startling them, and the tropical heat brushed in and touched them with a stabbing touch as salt as tears, and it seemed that Africa—the whole earth—had suddenly shrunk to a mote of star dust crazily whirling in the moon's immense, white dazzle.

A night hawk was sounding his grim, melancholy cry from an isolated tree in the back yard. A signal drum sobbed in the distance, broke off in mid air. Far off, a hyena laughed in its obscene, staccato dirge.

“Dost thou believe in—*them*?” repeated d’Albani, through clenched teeth.

“Yes—and no!”

The other laughed.

“The which means yes?” came his comment, “and—”

“Well?”

“Hast thou ever heard of Mahommed Bello, the Emir of the Fulahs?”

“He has been dead these two hundred years or so.”

Again d’Albani laughed, disagreeably.

“Has he?” he asked.

“Go on—go on!”

And, after a moment's hesitation, Navarro d’Albani bent his head and spoke in whispers, at length, tensely, hectically, while the Arab listened, asking an occasional, pertinent question, and finally demanding in a hushed, slightly awed voice:

“Thou—thou hast it here—with thee—the—the thing?”

“Yes.”

D’Albani's hand disappeared beneath the Galla blanket and came out holding a small, round, compact bundle wrapped tightly in layers of discolored silk and exhaling a pungent aroma of myrrh and spikenard.

“Give it to me,” said Mahmoud Ali Daud.

“But”—the other looked up, and an expression came into his eyes of relief and, too, of fear—“but thee—I told thee and—Thou dost believe?”

“I do,” came the low reply.

“Then—why—”

The Arab took the little round bundle from between d’Albani's fingers and fastened it carefully into a fold of his waist-band.

“I shall do it,” he said. “I shall bear its burden of good things and of evil—because of our old friendship and”—he smiled—“a little, too, because of my greed for profitable trade. As to thee”—he drew a purse from his shawl and passed it across the table—“there are about fifty guineas in here. Enough to see thee to London and thence to Stamboul; once there, thou wilt go to my friend Hussain Mabrouk, the jewel merchant, in the quarter of Ey-youb, near the Mosque of El-Hajji Othman, and thou wilt mention my name, and he will give thee an honest price for the diamonds—”

“But—the medicine-men of the Warangas—they will know—in a few days—and—”

“I or my partner shall be there before they know. And as to thee—have no fear. One of the ships we have chartered sails from here to-morrow morning on the early tide. Thus thou art safe if even—though I doubt it—the medicine-men should find out about thy disappearance and the disappearance of—ah—the thing before I or Donachie should be able to get there. The captain will keep his mouth shut and, doubtless, for a few guineas, will let thee have a suit of European clothes. Come.”

A minute later another diamond sped the Portuguese hotel-keeper into immediate action. Turning to the hut where his house-boys slept, with curses and cuffs he recruited a dozen strong Krus. Silently, but rapidly, they went to the water's edge, and launched a boat; and eight bells had just sounded when it was propelled up to the side of the turbiner Dalziel Castle. Navarro d’Albani, followed by the Arab, came up by the pilot's ladder and—

"Right-o!" said the russet-bearded Liverpool skipper. "I'll keep my bloomin' trap shut. Clothes? Another right-o. I got my Sunday-go-to-meeting kickin' about my locker somewhere. It's yours for four quid. A bargain? Good. Goin', goin', gone!"

An hour later, with the young sun of the tropics shredding the night mists into ragged scarves and skeins and a staccato breeze flickering out of the west like the wind of a gaily flirted fan, Mahmoud Ali Daud entered his partner's room, shook him awake, and rolled the little bundle d'Albani had given him on the bed.

"Here, heart of my heart," he said, "is the key to the Waranga country. Here is the 'Open Sesame' to its locked treasure-house of gold and ivory and diamonds."

CHAPTER V.

THE JUJU OF THE WARANGAS.

"ER—oh—what?" Donachie sat up and rubbed his heavy eyelids.

Then, seeing the package, he unwrapped it and, at once, dropped it back with a grunt of disgust and nausea. For, blotchy brown against the white of the bed linen, stared at him, out of empty, grinning sockets, the head of a man, mummified and shriveled to one-fifth its original size by the secret method known only to certain African tribes and to the Malay pirates of the Straits, though, in former centuries, it was also known to the South American Indians.

"God! Donachie shivered. His lips and jaw worked as if he had swallowed a loathsome drug.

But his disgust did not last for long. He had lived in Africa for too many years; had been, if not exactly marred, yet tainted by its scabbed, cruel hand; had felt, too closely, the bunched, brutal enormity of this acrid land of lies and darkness and bloody superstitions. So, smiling grimly, he touched the shriveled head with second finger and thumb.

"What's the little gentleman's name?" he inquired. "And what's he supposed to be good for?"

"His name," replied the Arab, gravely, almost reverentially, "was Mahommed Bello. Dead he has been these two hundred years. But still his great Arab soul—may it rest in the sweet shadow of Paradise—rules the hinterland where, once, as Emir of the Fulahs, he ruled when he was alive, when he was a man of craft and pluck and strength upon the blue hills and in the green, steaming jungles."

"And now he is rather considerably dead," commented the other, his dour Scots soul rubbed the wrong way by his friend's Arab melliflence. "Now there isn't even enough pickin's on his head to satisfy a gorged carrion-hawk."

"Indeed!" Mahmoud Ali Daud inclined his head. "But—I repeat—his great soul still rules the land of the Warangas, the outlying province of that huge Fulah Empire of which he was Emir during his lifetime. Still the Warangas look up to him. His shriveled head is the fetish, the all-powerful juju of the outer kraals. And he who possesses this head"—He made an eloquent gesture.

And, in answer to his friend's questions, he repeated the conversation he had had with Navarro d'Albani, winding up with:

"He did not tell me how—by bullying or bribing the medicine-men, or by playing hand in hand with them and killing off the more dangerous of them later on, after they had served their turn—he possessed himself of the juju-head. But he did, somehow! And you know—Double-Dee knows—all the independent traders know—the Chartered Company knows—how he succeeded—"

"You mean that—really—it was this juju which helped him to—"

"Of course. There was nothing else. He was a white man, in the heart of the jungle, alone. Then—and this is another tale—a tale of his youth and of a woman and of the love which passeth understanding—"

"A tale which you might spare me!"

"A tale which I have no intention of telling you—he decided to return to his own land. He took along a fortune. In diamonds. As to the chiefs and the medicine-men—"

"He told them some cock-and-bull story, I guess?"

"Yes. That he had to go away, by himself, into the deep jungle, to commune with the spirit of Mohammed Bello, for all I know. For you know what these savage blacks are like—half children and half monkeys. And superstitious—may Allah protect me against the craftiness of the idolaters!"

"It 'd be fairer to ask Allah to protect the idolaters against the wiles of the Moslems," Donachie interrupted dryly.

But Mahmoud Ali Daud continued, unheeding:

"They depended on him, the possessor of the juju-head. They believed that the spirit of the dead Emir had entered his soul. He himself, the better to keep out the other traders, had spread the legend that possession of the head meant mastery and dominion; that the head must never leave the Waranga country, otherwise a bitter blight would descend upon the land, killing the cattle, drying up the rivers, causing the fields to die and the women to become sterile. And the Warangas believed the legend thoroughly. Perhaps too thoroughly."

"Too thoroughly?"

"Yes. For, at the last, obeying some perverse streak in his nature, perhaps resolved that, even after his return to his own land, no white man should enter the Waranga country or, if a white man did succeed, that the road should be made as hard and thorny as possible for him, he decided to take along the juju-head. He did. He left. And"—the Arab made a great, sweeping gesture—"three days later, after he had crossed the border, fear came to him in the watches of the night, squatting on his soul like a black devil of misfortune. Fear of the unseen! Superstitious fear! Fear that—perhaps—the legend had become true to the clouting—that really the spirit of the dead Emir protected the Warangas. And, too, actual, physical fear. For, he thought, the medicine-men and the chiefs would begin to worry about his protracted absence, they might enter the juju lodge and find that the head had been stolen. And then—"

"Well, what then?"

"You know these Warangas. They never forget, never forgive. Let Navarro d'Albani hide where he please—they will find—and kill—and—"

"Yes—"

"It will be our work, brother mine, to go to the Waranga country and put the head back in its secret place in the jungle lodge before the medicine-men find out. And then—with the help of Allah—will come the shining apex of Double-Dee! And as for the Chartered Company—*wah*—they shall chew the bitter kernel of disappointment and envy, and they shall not like the taste of it!"

The shining apex of Double-Dee!

Mastery of the hinterland trade! Dominion of the Waranga country! The Chartered Company humbled in the dust! A shimmering, rainbow dream—but it had materialized!

For, the next morning, without servants or bearers or guides lest their secret mission become known and be gossiped about from kraal to kraal with the droning and the thumping of the drums, James Donachie and Mahmoud Ali Daud had set out from the coast and gone up-country; and never, to their dying day, did either of them forget the bitter, long wilderness pull: the steady, heartbreaking trek through the miasmatic hinterland of the colony, a blistering two days through a yellow-and-purple wedge of desert with the sun poised high like a coppery-red balloon, and on into a density of virgin forest where the blackish green of the giant trees and the huge, bloated creepers refreshed them after the pitiless open spaces and the blanched sands; the plunge across the border, using unbeaten paths so that nobody might know or suspect and bring word to the ever-watchful spies of the Chartered Company, into the deep jungles of the interior; the trail for many days that was nothing but a few fugitive tracks in the undergrowth where every second step squished down to thick, smelly water; occasionally a clearing where the sun struck like the fires of purgatory and where flashing white and green things rustled out of

their way—day after day, night after night—nearly two weeks of travel through a dense forest.

But they had succeeded. They had found the jungle temple, squatting by the side of a far, nameless river like a great toadstool. The medicine-men had not yet become worried over Navarro d'Albani's protracted absence, and so the two partners—the Scotchman disapproving of the action with every cell and fiber of his rigid Presbyterian soul, and the Arab clicking his rosary beads and mumbling ceaseless prayers of forgiveness to Allah—had put the juju-head back where it belonged, its sightless eyes once more, sardonically, surveying the grisly collections of voodoo charms that the worshipers had spread below it on the ground.

Then, through the forcefully recruited services of a couple of bush dwarfs, they had sent for the chiefs and the medicine-men. They had met them in full, solemn conclave. And it was here that the Arab had been in his element—"the crackinest bit o' bluff ever pulled in Africa," Donachie used to call it afterward.

For, with all his sweeping Semite eloquence, with all his remarkable knowledge of savage psychology, embroidering the legend which d'Albani had started, adding to it, toying with it, weaving new superstitions into the old, and shamelessly twisting to heathen purpose certain quotations from his favorite esoteric tome, Al-Bayzawi's "*Ilm al-Tafsir*" or Exegesis of the Koran, he had convinced them that Navarro d'Albani, *alias* Darwaysh Ukkhab, had left his "beloved Warangas" in the keeping of Double-Dee, that to Double-Dee had descended the keeping of the juju-head—they had it, proof supreme, since even in the wilderness possession is nine points of the law—that into the soul of Double-Dee had now entered the dead Emir's worth and spirit.

Trade, then!

Trade, systematic, constructive, thorough, perfectly dovetailed in every step from steamer's wharf to overland porter, from loom to jobber, from jobber to factory agent, from factory agent to the

chief's obese wife bullying her plum-colored, ocher-painted, plumed warrior-husband into the purchase of twenty yards of American cloth blending an unlikely sunset of purple and sulfur-yellow and pink and glaucous green.

Gold dust and rubber, tusks and hides and orchilla roots; and—flitting back across the overland trail, with a thousand per cent profit on the investment and, perhaps, occasionally, when beyond the white man's coast law, salted down with the swish and pain of the sjambok—beads and knives and trinkets.

Trade!

Trade that had made the independent merchants gasp with impotent envy and—after Double-Dee, the Waranga country fully organized, had appointed Hendrick Van Plaaten, the expatriate Vaal Boer, as their chief agent there and, in a way, given the sanctity of the juju-head which was their spiritual and financial trade-mark, their semi-divine viceroy—that had finally caused the Chartered Company to make certain overtures to them, at last cabling them to come to Brussels for a business conference.

CHAPTER VI.

WEDDED TO FATE.

AT the time, Donachie had been down with fever, and so it was his partner who had gone to Europe, and there had been that memorable interview—the second apex of Double-Dee's career—with Baron Adrien de Roubaix.

The Chartered Company suing for peace! The Chartered Company asking for terms! The Chartered Company *begging* to be allowed to share the rich plums of the Waranga country.

At first, of course, the baron had been slightly sarcastic, rather patronizing. He had attempted to cheapen the price by cheapening the quality of the ware. Then, seeing the sardonic, mocking look in the Arab's hooded eyes, seeing, furthermore, the handful of uncut diamonds, Waranga diamonds, which the other had drawn from his pocket with studied carelessness, he had

become friendly and somewhat confidential; then he had cajoled; at last wheedled and implored.

And, always, Mahmoud Ali Daud's stony reply that—yes—Double-Dee was willing to sell, would turn over their assets and good-will, including their mysterious hold on the Waranga country—for fifty-one per cent of the stock, common as well as preferred, of the Chartered Company. Control, in other words. Mastery.

"No, no!" the baron had exclaimed, fluttering his white, beringed hands. "Forty per cent!"

"Fifty-one!"

"Forty-two!"

"Fifty-one!"

"Forty-three!"

"Fifty-one!"

Up to forty-nine the baron had raised the price, to find himself confronted by the same stone wall, the same wearisome, maddening repetition:

"Fifty-one!"

There the matter had rested, the baron, at the very last, so far forgetting his usual good breeding as to make a threat against Double-Dee; and, flushed with triumph, Mahmoud Ali had returned to the west coast, to be greeted there by bitter news; news that Double-Dee, suddenly, overnight, finding themselves in a fight for their very existence, had tried to keep secret from everybody except their most confidential agents, Gonzelez, and Kinsella, and DuPlessis, and Shareef Ansar, formerly the Arab's pipe-wallah, a half-breed Zanzibaree, who had recently been raised to the position of sub-agent, because of his loyal services and his great knowledge of the hinterland.

There had been no reason to suspect that the secret had not been kept. Otherwise there would have been a change in the slightly servile manners of the independent traders to the two partners when they met on the street, at the Grand Hotel over a cup of coffee and a game of matador-dominoes, or at the Double-Dee godown to bargain over discounts, an obligato glass of gin conveniently at their elbows. There would have been desertions from the ranks of their blacks, and their credit in London,

Manchester, and Liverpool would have tumbled.

No, thought the Arab; their secret had been well guarded, and yet, here, to-day, a few months later, was Baron Adrien de Roubaix, and he was not the same man who had spoken to him, in Brussels, with hectic, imploring accents. Arrogant he was now, and haughty, and—he had made certain sneering, slurring allusions.

"Dead men tell no tales," he had said, "and dead men cannot trade."

And he had added that the very office-boys in Brussels were whispering about what was happening up-country.

The last was doubtless a lie. For—slim consolation—the manners of the independent traders were unchangedly suave, and, only two days earlier, the London & Union Bank had cabled their assent to a three-months, unsecured loan of thirty thousand pounds sterling at bank rate. But there was no denying the fact that the baron knew what had befallen Double-Dee in the Waranga country. There was no sidestepping the fact that the baron, who, a sharp business man, was also a pleasure-loving man about town, had made a hurried trip to the west coast, in the hottest season of the year, aboard the Chartered Company yacht. He had said that it was "special business" which had brought him here.

What did it portend?

What was in the wind?

"*Fi Aman 'illah!*" piously mumbled the Arab, looking after the Belgian's truculent back, and, a few minutes later he faced his partner in his private office.

Donachie, a cigar between his teeth, his feet elevated to the heat-gangrened table which was littered with correspondence and stray bits of riding-gear, looked up as the Arab entered, and the latter sensed at once, instinctively, that if his own news were unfavorable, Mahmoud Ali Daud, too, had some to communicate that were not exactly roseate.

For they knew each other. Their partnership, through the hot, stinking, yellow African years, had grown into a thing finer and stronger than a mere business combination for the sake of profit.

A real affection had sprung up between these two men from the ends of the earth; and though, when alone in their wattle-and-daub living-house which overlooked the rush-fringed river, they quarreled freely and frequently—never about their decisions, but rather about their divergent methods of arriving at the selfsame decisions—they could read each other's mind like an open book.

Thus it was with a lop-sided smile that James Donachie said he was willing to wager dollars to doughnuts that his own news were fully as bad as his friend's, and he pointed at a blue cable-slip.

"Came shortly after you left, Mahmoud," he said. "I've decoded it."

The other read.

It said, courteously, lyingly, and expensively, at four and sixpence a word, that the London & Union Bank regretted exceedingly, *et cetera*; but that in the matter of the three months' unsecured loan of thirty thousand pounds sterling, though they knew that they agreed to it three days back, though they realized the unbusiness-like methods, *et cetera*, still, given certain unforeseen conditions of the market, *et cetera*, they would be greatly obliged if, *et cetera*. If Double-Dee had already drawn on the loan, such amounts would be transferred to the current account—and then a few more hypocritical and expensive *et ceteras*.

"Rats leaving the sinking ship," commented the Scot.

"Yes, agreed the Arab, "and sharks waiting below in the black, swirling waters, for the ship to turn turtle—to gorge themselves with flesh. One sharp especially! Blunt-nosed! Cruel! Most evil! A Belgian shark!"—and he told his friend about the meeting with Baron Adrien de Roubaix.

"In other words," said Donachie, "the gentry of the Chartered Company have found out about what's been going on up there in the Waranga country"—he pointed through the window, to the east, where the land rose slowly, then, suddenly, curved fantastically and raced away to a tight, pigeon-blue sky—"and they are the back of this"—indicating the cablegram.

"Perhaps not exactly at the back of it," replied the Arab.

"No?"

"No. Rather"—Mahmoud Ali Daud lowered his voice—"in front of it!"

"Which—translated into less metaphorical English—is s'posed to mean what?"

"Just an idea of mine thrown out! Just a soft-footed, groping suspicion—a feeling—an instinct—that the Chartered Company did not have to *hear* about what happened to us in the hinterland."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it was the company which caused the—ah—accidents—call them what you wish—which, in their turn, caused the news and led to the curtailing of our credit in London—which may lead, if Fate be harsh and our own flesh not strong enough, to the end of Double-Dee."

Donachie shook his head.

"No, no," he said. "I have no call to break a lance for that Chartered gang. Still—it's impossible—impossible, man!"

"Nothing is impossible in the eye of Allah," said the Arab. "When the impossible happens, it is seen—a stone swims in the water—a feather breaks the back of a full-grown man—an ape sings a love song—and once I met an honest Greek!"

The other made a weary gesture.

"Yes, yes," he said. "Very pretty little metaphors. But—why—we carried right on with Navarro d'Albani's scheme—we've stopped every hole—sealed the whole darned hinterland up as hermetically as—"

"We *thought* we had. And yet the facts of the case remain—three graves up yonder in the bush, heart of my heart—and the baron knows—and smiles!"

"Even so—even suppose he found out, somehow—why—what you accuse him of—"

"I do not accuse. I suspect."

"I know your way of suspecting. And—no—the Chartered Company—they would not stoop to—"

"Murder—since, doubtless, it was murder?"

"Exactly!"

"And why not, little brother? *Wah!*" And there was in the Arab's words all the sordid heart of the scabbed, festering Black

Lands—"this is Africa, Africa! The graveyard of the white man's decencies! The land of the cursed, thin-shanked, flat-footed seed of Ham! Why not murder then? You yourself—look back into your own life as Africa made you live it. And I—when I think of the past years and the past sins—of—oh—things—May the Prophet intercede for me on the Day of Judgment!"

"Yes," admitted Donachie. "I—I have taken life—but—not for gain—for the sake of profit—"

And the next moment, not with clean-cut suddenness, high-stepping, sharply silhouetted, but matter-of-fact, drab, not as the unexpected but as the ever-to-be-expected—bitter, startling news drifted in, on the lips of a short, bow-legged Zanzibaree half-breed, Shareef Ansar, still white as a leper with the dust of the long trek, his eyes burning deep in their sockets with the fatigues of the wilderness pull, his thatch of rough, bristly hair bleached blotchy-red by the merciless sun of the hinterland.

"DuPlessis!" Shareef Ansar whispered, as he stumbled across the threshold. And he shivered and stopped, and took breath deeply, painfully trying to speak, choking—"Allah."

Mahmoud Ali Daud caught the fainting man in his arms and bent close. He read more than heard the next words from Shareef Ansar's blanching lips.

"Dead—DuPlessis—same way—ears—nailed to chest—"

And then Donachie raised his hairy fists to heaven and broke into curses, while the Arab, having lifted the unconscious man into a chair, opened his shirt, and set the electric punka into motion, walked over to the wall and studied closely the back pages of the calendar where tiny black crosses, accompanied by names, marked certain dates.

"McDonald," he read, "Alvensleben, Moustaffa el-Touati. Three of our best—of Double-Dee's best. And each lasted less than a week. And now—now DuPlessis—'Afrikander' DuPlessis—"

He turned, looked at his partner, and put his hand on his shoulder. It was a steady, strong, soothing hand, caressing

the heaving shoulder with a deliberate rhythmic motion. For he could feel for the other; could read the seething, maddening rage in the other's heart, and he remembered moments in his own life, in the past, when suddenly the madness of the tropics, following bitter disappointment, had seemed to creep out of the jungle, out of the pitiless heart of the bloated noonday sun and touch his brain with a pricking, sardonic, red-hot needle.

"Friend," he said; "old friend—come—"

Donachie did not reply. His feet tapped the floor with rapid beats in a paroxysm of nervous restlessness. He was staring straight in front of him with unwinking, dull eyes, thinking of the past, the killing, heartbreaking work, the years of up-hill fighting, the shining hopes, the promises, the great ambitions, clouted together, finally, into high achievement, into a solid Burgess building cemented with blood and sweat and the enthusiasm of their youth, the steady strength of their manhood: Double-Dee, respected, envied.

And then he thought of the future—stretching before him like a gray, leprous sunset, without hopes or promises—the future of Double-Dee—a pitiful memory on the lips of the west coast traders—a leering, sneering mockery on the lips of the very riffraff, the genteel species of beachcombers, the driftwood of the outer seas who met night after night in the bar of the Grand Hotel and cadged for drinks.

He felt a strange moisture in his eyes. His words came thick, halting, enormously sincere.

"God—help, O God!"

"God *will* help," gently said the Arab. "But He will only help if we help ourselves!"

And then calmness returned to James Donachie on the backwash of his pawky Scots humor.

"You're all to the good for a Moslem fatalist, Mahmoud my lad," he said; and he gave a short laugh. "Double-Dee is—"

"Double-Dee is wedded to Fate itself, heart of my heart!" came the Arab's magnificent boast.

"Maybe. All I hope is that Fate will stick to her lawfully wedded husband."

And they both laughed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CLEMENCY OF MAHMOUD ALI DAUD.

YET the news, culminating in the baron's mocking allusions and the London & Union Bank's refusal to grant the loan, were bad; had been bad for months now.

It had started within two days after Mahmoud Ali Daud had refused Baron de Roubaix's offer with his stolid counter offer of fifty-one per cent of the stock of the Chartered Company.

At first the Waranga country had been a veritable treasure house. Under the ministry of Hendrick Van Plaatzen, their chief agent, the juju of Mohammed Bello's head had worked like a charm. Trade had been smooth and tremendously profitable. Ivory, rubber, gold, and—diamonds. Diamonds had trickled down to the coast in an incessant, precious stream, so steadily that already the great DeBeers Company of Kimberly, the Diamond Trust, had begun to make diplomatic overtures to Double-Dee with a view of keeping the market from becoming glutted and the prices from tumbling.

The Warangas had seemed unspoiled and friendly, serene in their heathenish superstition that the spirit of the dead Emir Mohammed Bello had entered into Double-Dee, and that, as long as the grisly juju-head was enthroned in the jungle lodge and received certain nameless periodical sacrifices—to the fact of which Double-Dee's agents casuistically closed their eyes—no harm would come to their kraals and their cattle.

"Nor had harm come—to them!" as James Donachie would comment ruefully.

Of course, Van Plaatzen's death had been an accident or, rather, his own fault.

A big, hairy Vaal Boer, solid, trustworthy, fearless, shrewd, he had had but one failing: whenever he came out of the wilderness and reached the comparative civilization and plenty of the coast, he had

rioted and debauched for three weeks, never more nor less, on a pompous, magnificent scale.

Returning from the Waranga country one day with a very fine eighty-five carat steel-blue diamond which he had not wished to entrust to the native bearers—a diamond known afterward to the trade and to the world at large as the *Double-Dee Apex*, and which, after many romantic, blood-stained adventures and vicissitudes, the telling of which is another story as yet unwritten, sparkles to-day in the tiara of Mrs. Jackson Oberhuber, the widow of the famous Chicago packer—he had gone on his usual spree, and an overdose of *dop* and brandy had killed him, after his dying imagination had peopled the back room of Leopoldo de Sousa's hotel with a splendid collection of pea-green elephants and crocodiles in a delicate shade of rose-madder.

McDonald had been sent in his stead, then Alvensleben, and then Moustaffa el-Touati. Three men of different races and temperaments: Ulster-Scot, Dane, and Arab, but all three African born and bred, familiar with the country, its customs, prejudices, and superstitions, and a diversity of its clicking languages, and all trusted employees of Double-Dee who had made good at other important bush stations before they had been sent to the Waranga country.

And, one after the other, each lasting less than a week, they had met the identical cruel, incredible, rather sardonic death. They had been found with their eyes gouged out, their tongues and ears cut off, the ears nailed to their chests with the help of spiky elephant thorns—as if, commented Mahmoud Ali Daud, the unknown assassin or assassins had meant to convey some sinister message, perhaps a warning, by the very method of killing.

It had been the fact of this method, of the three bodies having been thus mutilated, which had immediately exonerated the Warangas. For, as Sigismondo Mercado, a clever and trustworthy half-breed Portuguese bush detective who had been sent up by Double-Dee under pledge of secrecy to investigate the cases, had pointed out: the Warangas never mutilate, not

even the bodies of their most hated enemies, considering such a deed blasphemy unspeakable.

Mercado had made an exhaustive examination, but had found no trace of the criminals. The natives had been fully as shocked and grieved as Double-Dee and very willing to answer all questions.

In the first case, that of Angus McDonald, his house-boys, living in a hut a stone's throw away from the agency building, remembered having heard voices the night of the murder, McDonald's voice, and another man's. They had seen McDonald leave the house, still talking animatedly to some one by his side.

"Did they talk in English?" Mercado had asked.

And the answer had been that—yes—it had been English or some other European language—the Warangas did not know the difference, but were sure it had not been any of the African dialects of the neighboring countryside. Nor had they been able to recognize the stranger—it had been a dark and moonless night—not even to see if he wore the dress of a white man or of a native. They had found the mutilated body the next morning, a mile from the agency post, in the jungle undergrowth, led there by the barking of the jackals.

The news had been sent by private drum code to Double-Dee, who, knowing the jealousy of the independent traders and of the Chartered Company, and how the latter might use the murder as the thin end of the wedge wherewith to spread uneasiness among the negroes and open their campaign for commercial penetration of the Waranga country, had kept it secret and had sent Alvensleben to the interior.

Shortly afterward he had met his death when he had gone out hunting wart-hog, alone; and Moustaffa el-Touati, forewarned by the fate of his two predecessors, had been unable to escape it. Always, day and night, he had been protected by files of armed blacks. Yet one day, out of the thick jungle, an assegai had sobbed and pierced his heart, and two days later, in the dead of night, the grave had been opened and the corpse mutilated as the others had been.

Now, finally, it had been the turn of DuPlessis, "Afrikander" DuPlessis, the best man of his kind in Africa, just as conversant with jungle and forest lore and with savage psychology as Mahmoud Ali Daud himself. He had left with a laugh on his lips, with calm words that echoed a serene belief in his own power.

"No, no!" he had said to the two partners. "Don't you worry on my account. I can take care of myself. If any obligato ear-slicing has got to be done, it's going to be little me who's going to do the slicing."

He had been accompanied by Shareef Ansar, the half-breed Zanzibaree, one of Double-Dee's most loyal servants.

"I give DuPlessis effendi into thy keeping!" Mahmoud Ali Daud had said, on parting, to his former pipe-wallah. "It shall be thy honorable duty to protect him with thy life!"

The other had salaamed deeply.

"Indeed!" he had given reply. "The sword which is meant for the heart of DuPlessis effendi will have to pierce first mine own heart. I swear it on the Koran, O Sheykh!"

Everything had gone well. Another package of diamonds—two hundred odd carat in fair-sized stones—had reached the coast under DuPlessis's seal. Word had come of a king's ransom in first-class ivory that had been discovered. The production of rubber had taken an immediate upward leap. Peace and plenty was in the kraals. Then DuPlessis had drum-coded that he was proceeding to the coast, with Shareef Ansar, to bring important news.

And now—

Mahmoud Ali Daud bent over Shareef Ansar who was opening his eyes.

"Tell me what has happened—exactly, little brother," he said.

And, the next moment, Shareef Ansar sat up, tried to speak, could not, and fell back at once with a choked gurgle, a thick, blackish whip of blood staining his tattered burnoose.

"God—what—"

Donachie rose, as white as chalk, while the Arab tore the burnoose apart and saw, below Shareef Ansar's first rib, a ragged

wound that had slipped its clumsy, impromptu bandage of rags and palm leaves. He snapped his lean fingers rapidly to ward off the hunchbacked djinni of misfortune.

Then he straightened up.

"Donachie," he said to his friend. "Shareef Ansar has kept his oath—partly!"

"Partly!"

"Yes. For he swore that the sword meant for DuPlessis would have to pierce first his own brave heart—and it appears that it was DuPlessis who was killed first. Shareef Ansar came here—with his last, dying strength—to bring the bitter message—And now—"

"What?" James Donachie hit the table with his clenched fist. "What 'll we do? Sell out to the Chartered Company—at their own terms—for a beggar's pittance—shall we—shall we—"

He was silent. From the compound outside, at the river's edge, came the incessant, uncouth babble of native voices, high-pitched, clicking, grunting, half-articulate, and every once in a while breaking into shrill, meaningless cackles and hooting laughter—the staccato, night-and-day undercurrent of all Africa's symphony—

Donachie looked up, suddenly, sharply alert. A native voice had pronounced a name:

"DuPlessis!"

Answering clicks—uncouth grunts—excited babblings—laughter—then again:

"DuPlessis! Bad juju—"

Click-click-click—a great, sobbing grunt—more babblings—

Donachie turned to his partner.

"They also—" he began. "They seem to know—already—and"—a bitter smile curled his lips—"when the jackals howl—"

"The jackals howl indeed," interrupted the Arab, sententiously. "But, even thus, will my old buffalo die therefore? Allah!" he went on, picking up his sjambok and making a significant gesture. "A stick to tan the jackal's stinking hide! And, as for the old buffalo of Double-Dee—"

"Well?"

"He still has the pride and strength of his horns—to rend and gore—and kill, if need be!"

He rose and left the room with unhurried step; and, a few minutes later, James Donachie could hear his partner's voice brushing in from the compound near the river's edge, talking in gently purring accents; then, suddenly, a wicked curse in Arabic; the swish of the sjambok as it cut through the air and raised welts on naked, plum-colored backs, and the command, in clicking Galla:

"It is thus then"—down came the sjambok—"and thus—and again thus, O ye evil-mouthed grandsons of great filth, that I argue with you—aye—plead with you, belike, to remain loyal to the house of Double-Dee that has been your father and mother these many years! A covenant— This is the covenant"—another sharp swish-swish-swish and answering howls of pain and imploring voices—"between ye dogs and Double-Dee! A most secret covenant which ye will keep faithfully! A covenant of silence—and no questions answered, whoever may ask them—and no desertions—and all of ye held responsible for every single one among ye—do ye understand, O ye sons of burnt fathers?"

"Yes, yes, O greatness, O clemency!" came the sobbing chorus.

And then the Arab's final:

"Great I am indeed! Clement to all the world—but most clement to ye, dogs, though ye do not deserve it!"

And once more the acrid swish of the sjambok.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIR CHARLES LANE-FOX.

HALF an hour later Mahmoud Ali Daud exchanged the usual grave and elaborate oriental salutations with Sir Charles Lane-Fox, the governor of the colony and an old friend of his, in the latter's office. Sir Charles Lane-Fox, ruling a land of many races, prided himself on being all things to all men—British to the British, Portuguese to the Portuguese, and Arab to the Arabs. Thus it was classic Arabic he talked to his visitor, and Arabic, too, was the manner in which the Galla

servant appeared, poured thick, burning, musk-flavored coffee into tiny cups, and placed on the low, inlaid taborets orange-flower water, cigarettes, rose-scented fruit-pastes cut in small squares, and honey-balls made of ground almonds and pistachenuts.

Slowly Mahmoud Ali Daud sipped the aromatic and nearly scalding liquid, uttered a polite "*Bismillah*," replied to in kind by the Englishman, wiped his fingers daintily on the embroidered napkin, and then remarked, with studied carelessness, that soul speaks closely to soul, but that the head and the hand answer for both.

"In other words," smiled Sir Charles, "you want my help?"

"Yes, old friend," said Mahmoud Ali Daud, slipping easily into English. "I want your help. I need it. There is nobody like you in the whole of Africa. Guide, philosopher, and friend—is not this the English saying—you are not only to Europeans and Arabs, but also—the which is salt to the impossible—to the natives themselves!"

Salt to the impossible; indeed! And it was the truth.

For it is known to all the world that Sir Charles Lane-Fox is the only man who understands the Africans—not only their virtues and their vices, which is nothing—but their mysteries—mysteries of which the Royal British Society for the Advancement of Science is completely and jeeringly ignorant, mysteries, the telling of which does not look well in an official, red-taped report to the Colonial Office.

He had lived up—is still living up—to the extraordinary theory that, as the governor of an Imperial Crown Colony, it is his duty to know more about the Dark Continent than the natives themselves—more even than the Congolese Arabs; and intent on such knowledge, he has dabbled in many unsavory places of that festering, gangrened, brooding land where he is serving his country because of his pride of race and class.

Withal, a lifetime in Africa had not scotched his sense of humor; and it was with humor—dry, slightly mischievous, slightly ironic—that he looked at the Arab

and thanked him for the compliment, adding:

"Haven't I read something somewhere or other about looking out when an Arab becomes too eloquent? And, too, didn't a little bird whisper words to me a while back about an Arab's greed?"

"Possibly," came the unruffled reply, "and it is indeed greed which has sent me here. For, through recent events, the very existence of Double-Dee has become threatened."

The governor laughed.

"Joshing me, aren't you?" he asked. "Double-Dee threatened? Why—might as well threaten the Old Lady of Thread-needle Street!"

"True, though. The dagger of bankruptcy is at our throat."

The words carried utter conviction, and Sir Charles looked serious. Double-Dee, apart certain lapses, the result of climate more than anything else, to which a wise governor did well to close his official eyes, had been a steady influence for law and order in the colony.

"Surely not as bad as all that, Mahmoud," said the Englishman.

"Absolutely. You know that African trade depends on long credit with the banks—"

"Of course. Well?"

"The banks have stopped our credit"—the Arab's voice broke slightly—"the credit of Double-Dee—"

"No—no—impossible—"

"But a fact!"

"Spite work—perhaps of the Chartered Company?"

"That—and more—and worse—"

"But—why—why?"

"Because of something that has happened to us up in the interior—in the Wanga country. And we need your help, Sir Charles."

The latter was a rich man and a generous man.

"How much money do you need?" he asked. "I fancy I can—"

"No, no. Many thanks. But it isn't that. Money—even a large amount—would only help us temporarily. How do you say in English—a 'drop in—'"

"A drop in the bucket?"

"Yes. Big trade needs continuous support, continuous, almost automatic credit. You see—it is the foundation of our building which is shaking."

"Been overspeculating?"

"No. We have not speculated at all. We have seen and grasped the greatest commercial opportunity in the whole of Africa—the Waranga country—a country twice the size of France, and rich—Allah—choking with riches! We have devoted all our influence and time and money to its development—and—now—" Mahmoud Ali Daud made a great gesture.

The governor inclined his head. Of late he had heard a great deal about the Waranga country, and there was at that moment, in his safe, a code message from the Colonial Office, marked secret and confidential, which spoke of it, spoke of British Imperial ambitions and interests and demands, of an all-British railway from the west to the east of Africa; spoke finally of a former treaty with a certain Continental power, that delineated the frontiers of future colonies and spheres of interests to be carved out of the huge African carcass. The certain Continental power was friendly. And still—there *were* the British Imperial interests; there *was* the old treaty gone into by a careless ambassador when the wine had been red and the little glasses of liqueur many and varicolored.

The Waranga country—thought Sir Charles—and Double-Dee's mysterious, potent influence up there—the old, foolish treaty—and, perhaps, since even the best are ambitious, dreams of a peerage—

Sir Charles was silent. He considered. Tried to develop and dovetail half-formed thoughts. Momentarily, the friend was lost in the shrewd diplomat.

"Yes, yes," he said finally, with the suspicion of a drawl that might have stood for many things. "Very interesting, I am sure, my dear Mahmoud—"

He was still suave, courtly, friendly. But there was a subtle, psychic change in the atmosphere, and the other, a Semite, sensitive to the core of him, noticed it, thought rapidly, then hid a smile. For years he had

followed Europe's shifting, gliding game on the African chess-board, and—to quote his own metaphorical boast—when it came to African politics he could "hear the fleas cough."

Thus, for all the good it did in that particular quarter, the code message sent Sir Charles by the Colonial Office might as well have been written in plain English and lie on the table in full view. He lit a cigarette, sipped his coffee; then, with crafty ingenuousness, he told the other exactly what had happened in the Waranga country, winding up with:

"Therefore I repeat, we need your help—to discover the murderers—to bring them to justice. If we fail, the natives will lose confidence—might be won over by—"

"The Chartered Company?"

"You have said it. Will you help us?"

He was fully prepared for Sir Charles's reply that, in his official capacity, he had no right to interfere.

"Of course you can't," Daud agreed. "The Waranga country is independent—the property of the native chiefs—"

"Under the—ah—protection of Double-Dee?" gently suggested Sir Charles.

The Arab gave a tiny wink, and the governor smiled.

"Suppose—well—" he began, stopped, stroked his honey-colored, silken mustache, and smiled again; and, at once, the Arab knew that the psychological moment had arrived, and put his cards on the table, face up.

"You have wondered about Double-Dee's influence among the Warangas?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Ah"—the Arab lowered his voice—"there is a head—a shriveled, human juju head—a very great fetish!"

"The possession of—"

"Yes. Of Double-Dee. But, supposing Double-Dee should prefer to paint this shriveled old fetish head with the Union Jack?"

"Splendid idea! Only—there happens to be an old treaty, Mahmoud, of which you know nothing—"

"Of which I know everything!" calmly interrupted the Arab. "A treaty with a

certain Continental power—a power which also, incidentally, is the sovereign lord of the Chartered Company!”

“Right,” admitted Sir Charles.

And again the Arab winked slowly and meaningly.

“Tell me,” he asked. “Is it not the immortal principle of Great Britain to protect weak and independent countries against foreign aggression—too, against the ruthless inroads of corporate interests—such as”—he purred—“the Chartered Company?”

“Quite so. Only—such weak and independent nations, to rely on Britain’s strong arm, must show—well—a reason for existence, stability, a measure of civilization, certain political stamina—a something, in other words, hardly ever obtained by savage African chiefs.”

Came a pause. Then the Arab’s casual:

“How about the men of my own race? Are *they* savages—without civilization—without stamina and political stability?”

“No.”

“Ah—” gently breathed the Arab, and they looked at each other as Greek is said to look at Greek, and for many minutes they conversed in a flat, cozy undertone.

Half an hour later Mahmoud Ali Daud left the governor’s residence with a mocking salaam in the direction of the Chartered Company’s corrugated building that looked like a gray stain upon the yellow nakedness of the square near the Chapel of the Jesuit Fathers, while Sir Charles Lane-Fox sent for his aide-de-camp and caused a certain amount of relief to that festively inclined young Briton by announcing that he had decided to take a leave of absence.

“How long, sir?”

“Don’t know yet. I am leaving tomorrow, Molyneux.”

“Going to England, sir?” inquired the aide-de-camp, dreams in his heart of shorter work hours, longer play hours, and a special gymkhana to be arranged in honor of a rosy-cheeked, violet-eyed Sussex maiden recently arrived in the colony on a visit to her uncle, Major Patterson of the Hausa Gunners.

“No. I am chevying up the interior for a bit, on *safari*—big game hunting—”

“Hope you’ll have jolly good sport. Any special instructions, sir?”

“Come back in an hour. Cable to go to the Colonial Office.”

“Code, sir?”

“Yes. But I’ll attend to the coding myself, Molyneux.”

“Thank you, sir.”

And, late the next afternoon, the purse-necked, red-faced Yorkshire knight who presided over the destinies of the Colonial Office, in Downing Street, London, read a cable slip, whistled through his teeth, and remarked in the direction of a framed portrait of Disraeli—Lord Beaconsfield—that “by gad! there are still a few constructive imperialists left in the bally old empire”; while, far out on the fringes of the little West African coast town where it merges, with the dramatic suddenness of the tropics, into a purple-gray welter of jungle and forest and thorny bush, the governor was stepping out with the easy, hip-swinging step of a man used to the long trek.

He was alone, nor had this created comment or curiosity. For years it had been a habit of his to roam through the hinterland unaccompanied by as much as a porter or a gun-bearer.

The second day out, late in the afternoon, he met an ash-smeared, wild-locked, fierce-eyed Moslem dervish—a sort of Islamic hedge-priest—who popped out at him from a clump of odorous cinnamon palms with a sonorous:

“*Salaam aleykhum!*”

“*Yah aleykhum salaam!*” came the courtly retort.

Then a low-voiced inquiry, an answer; and the governor disappeared in a small palm-leaf hut that blended perfectly into the thick undergrowth, to reappear, not long afterward, the first dervish’s brother-in-the-craft in sacred unkemptness.

“Sir Charles—” began the first dervish.

“Sir Charles no more! I am the Hajji Othman ibn Othman el-Yezdi, and a most learned man, well versed in the Koran and the Hadith, a disciple of the great Saint Abu Hanifyieh, and your lodge brother, Mahmoud!”

“Oh—Mahmoud?” smiled the other.

“Yes. No reason why *you* should

change your name. It's as common among you Arabs as Campbell is in the Highlands of Scotland. Come—lodge brother—together we two shall bring the blessed lessons of the Koran to the naked savages of the outer kraals!"

And, with correct, nasal, guttural intonation, thereby slightly scandalizing the Arab, the Englishman chanted the Moslem declaration of faith—the "*Allah il'ulah Mohammed rasul 'ilah*"—and "*Allah il'ulah Mohammed rasul 'ilah*," he chanted again, with hierarchic, pontifical unction, a day or two later as, well beyond the northeastern frontier of the Crown colony, he entered the hut of a Waranga tribal chief who bowed before the two dervishes with courtly greetings and a barbarous clanking and jingling of copper ornaments.

For two savages—they being perhaps the most tolerant people on earth—a holy man is a holy man, be he Moslem or Christian or Jew or Buddhist or fetish medicine-man; and so the Waranga chief treated his guests with respect, gave them food and drink, and replied to their questions to the best of his ability.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WORD FROM NOWHERE.

AND it seemed that the two wandering dervishes had many questions to ask, that they were leaky-tongued gossips even when measured with the garrulous Arab yard-stick. The news of the villages they wanted to know, of the pasture lands, of the desert and the sown, the forests and the jungles and the swamps, of kraals and compounds and voodoo huts; gossip of white man and black and half-breed.

Everything appeared to interest them, everything they asked, of chief and medicine-man and villager and shepherd, day after day, the farther they penetrated into the hinterland. The natives gave answer readily, unsuspecting, even a little amused; for, of old, since the days of the Congolese Arab conquerors, did they know that curiosity and greed for information are the besetting sins of the tribe of Shem.

It was thus, by gradual elimination,

never pushing a point too far for all their insatiable curiosity, that Arab and Englishman—working the one for his and his partner's private interests, the other for imperial glory, yet, both, somehow, for civilization and peace—discovered a certain thin trail that, while proving nothing exactly startling or altogether new, yet corroborated Mahmoud Ali Daud's instinctive suspicion that the Chartered Company was at the back of the whole trouble.

Their first discovery was of the negative variety. For they found out that nobody had attempted to interfere with the juju head by fief of which Double-Dee held spiritual, political, and commercial sway over the country.

On the other hand, since the unknown assassins had plied their deadly trade almost within sight of the fetish temple, they must surely have known of its existence and powerful significance.

Why then had they not tried to steal it, to do away with it, to duplicate, to all intents and purposes, the trick by which Double-Dee had gained possession?

Here Arab and Englishman differed radically as to the reason.

The former opined that the juju head's sacro-sanctity was entirely due to physical causes, to the armed show of force by which he had surrounded it, since he had strengthened the Waranga guard of honor about the lodge temple by picked and trustworthy blacks from among his own followers, Bakotos and Bagaweles and Banonogos, chief of them M'Kindi, the outcast Balolo, who had first brought him word about the mysterious coming of Darwaysh Ukkhab, *alias* Navarro d'Albani; while Sir Charles Lane-Fox explained the continued state of inviolability in which the juju head was held as really a master stroke on the part of the Chartered Company.

"For," he said, "a savage is a simple human nature. He understands force, but is quite blind to intrigue, to subterranean underhandedness. To obtain the juju head by force, or theft, since theft *is* force—would—oh—rather cheapen its spiritual value. But, if it should get under the control of the Chartered Company by clever, invisible manipulations, by intrigues

—why, my dear Mahmoud, that would be rather a tremendous point gained by the Continental gentry—what?”

At all events, whatever the reasons, the fact remained the juju head seemed inviolate in its place of honor in the jungle temple, its sightless eyes, as before, surveying the grisly collection of voodoo charms that the worshipers had spread below it on the ground.

The other discovery was that a certain dissatisfaction was spreading like powder under spark among the Warangas. It was not exactly directed against Double-Dee themselves, but rather an uneasiness—even a sort of affectionate worry since both partners were popular with the native population—as to the firm’s spiritual standing and salvation.

“Yes!”—to quote the words of M’pwa, a great Waranga chief, whom they interviewed—“pumped” would be the more correct expression—one night over tobacco and palm wine. “There is no doubt of Double-Dee’s kindness and justice and fairness to all our people. Father and mother they have been to us and the morning dews and the ripening sun and the soft, soft rain of the wet season—”

He slurred, paused, sobbed, looked away from the two strangers, stirred the fire with the naked, callous sole of his foot till it blazed bright and hard and clear. He shivered a little and glanced rapidly over his shoulder, and, at once, the Arab winked significantly at the Englishman and whispered:

“Here comes the beginning of the end of the mystery whose slippery tail we have been chasing these many days!”

And it came, with a few words, short, broken, hacked, pronounced with a voice that was low, and yet pregnant with an unexpected, rather bitter strength:

“And—yet—”

Again the chief slurred and paused, again shivered, again glanced over his shoulders into the dark corners of the hut where the flickering flames were painting shadows among the black shadows, then grinning out with yellow eyes like mischievous hobgoblins.

“And yet—what?” softly echoed Mahmoud Ali Daud.

M’pwa shrugged his massive shoulders. He looked away from the compelling Arab eyes, felt drawn toward them as a bird is said to be fascinated by a snake’s flat, filmy eyes, sobbed with all a savage’s congenital melancholia, then, suddenly, as if to get through with an unpleasant task that had to be performed, made up his mind and spoke.

“I will tell you—” he said. “Perhaps you two can help and advise—you two—being holy men—”

“Very holy!” interrupted Sir Charles Lane-Fox, with never a smile.

“In league,” commented Mahmoud Ali Daud, not to be outdone, jealous of his eloquence as only an Arab can be, “with the forces of good—but also with Musboot, the Devil, the Great Devil, the Father of Lies and Confusion, the Lord of Black-Black Darkness! Thus”—and the feline purr of his voice was marred by a threat—“tell us truthfully, O chief!”

“I will. Peace was in the land and plenty and satisfaction. And then—word came—”

“From where?” sharply cut in the Arab.

M’pwa made a vague, hopeless gesture.

“Out of the nowhere,” he replied—“out of the bush—the swamps—the forests—the jungles—”

“Word by the sob of the drum, belike? By the gossip of the kraals—”

“Word from all over”—again the vague, hopeless gesture, and a flash of white, frightened eyeballs—“word from all over, all at once. Wherever men talked in council hut and women gossiped over the cooking fires and *umlinos* brewed medicine, the word came—was there—grew and stretched and bloated—like a snake of fire, burning, burning—”

“Like a snake of fire, burning, burning,” he repeated, and the Arab remembered that this was a Waranga synonym for the supernatural, while the Englishman became a little impatient.

“Are you an old woman,” he asked, “belike a barren spinster, fit only to wipe the children’s noses and clean the household

pots, that you babble babblings like the east wind, the wind without sense? 'Word came,' you say, '*came!*' You say that word was all over, all at once. But—whence and why and whither? Give us straight talk, chief!"

The Waranga rose, crossed the hut, and pulled aside the crimson, woolen blanket that covered the entrance. With a great deal of dignity, he pointed out into the night where, suddenly, the amazing stillness of the tropics was broken by the sounds of jungle and forest: the sardonic hooting of some great, dog-faced ape, the growl of a feeding lioness peaking from a rumbling, guttural bass to a shrill, incongruous treble, the mocking chirp and whistle of innumerable monkeys, the vicious, staccato barking of a fetid, spotted hyena sniffing for the reek of carrion, the crash of a warthog breaking uncouthly through the undergrowth, the frightened flutter of soft-winged birds before the murderous pounce of the hawk.

"Ask—*them!*" he said. "*I do not know!*"

He spoke with a sort of tense simplicity, enormously tragic in a way, throbbing with all the ever-present drama, the nameless fear and melancholia of the tropics, and the others realized that he was giving them the truth.

"No!" he repeated. "*I do not know. I only know that word came, that word was here and there and all over—at once—wherever people foregathered! There was no escaping the word! There was no shutting one's ear or one's soul to its meaning! It was whispered everywhere—aye!—everywhere—*"

And he went on to say that this word, which was all over, all at once, brushing out of the nowhere, the jungle, the forest, the pasture, and the sky, had spoken strange things; strange things—though this was not the way he put it—that, challenging, menacing, incomprehensible to the savage mind, had frightened the Warangas the more through the very pageantry of their obscure and ominous possibilities, the presentiment of a nameless doom that, once the theory was partly established in their minds, seemed to lurk ill-concealed behind

every detail of what was going on in the hinterland—

Things that caused Sir Charles Lane-Fox to look up sharply, and Mahmoud Ali Doud, as was his superstitious wont, to snap his fingers rapidly and to touch the string of blue lapis beads about his neck.

For, it appeared, the word which was "all over, all at once," had declared and was declaring everywhere that the spirit of Mohammed Bello, the dead Fulah Emir whose shriveled head was the fetish of the land, was dissatisfied with its psychic abiding-place in Double-Dee; that it was seeking for a new home, in somebody else's body; that, in fact, it was transmigrating, ready—said the Englishman in a whisper to the Arab—to reincarnate itself very much like the soul of the Gautama Buddha or the Sakhyamuna Buddha which never dies, but chronically seeks and finds a new flesh envelope in which to work the many miracles.

"But"—Mahmoud Ali Daud turned to the Waranga—"why—tell me—why? The Warangas are in the keeping of the sacred juju head, aren't they?"

"Assuredly!"—the answer came with a thump of utter sincerity.

"And"—was the next question—"the Warangas are not complaining of Double-Dee?"

"What reason is there for complaint? Father and mother are Double-Dee to the people of the kraals! Never an unjust action, never a bad deed! Merciful they are—and—"

"Exactly! So I was told before. Therefore—why should the spirit of Mohammed Bello be dissatisfied with Double-Dee? It is unreasonable, unjust, and—"

"Yes, yes! But that, too, has been explained by the word that is everywhere, all at once! For"—the Waranga was trying hard to put strange, unaccustomed ideas into the uncomplex native dialect which had no words even for the germs of these ideas—"you have heard of"—he paused, puzzled, wrinkled his forehead in strong endeavor, went on hesitatingly—"former lives? Former lives of—oh—same people—in other bodies—often, often, years

ago, as many times as there are rays in the noon sun?"

"What do you mean, M'pwa?" asked the Arab a little angrily, to be immediately interrupted by the Englishman's soft:

"Go on, M'pwa. I understand!"

"Former lives! Other bodies! *Ahn-kwa!*" he clicked. "*Ahn-kwa!*" Again the puzzled, childlike expression on his face in rather ludicrous contrast with the ochre-and-white tribal smear across his flat nose and the waving plumes fastened by some mysterious methods in his short, kinky poll; again the vague, helpless gesturing.

His toes stirred the nearly extinct fire, kicking up a gray dust of warm ashes.

Another sobbing pause—and:

"Sayeth the word that is everywhere, all at once, that there is reward for merits of former lives—rewards in this life—ah—"

Yet another pause—the Arab's impatient grunt—the Englishman's whisper: "Ssst! Hold your horses!" and the Waranga continued, struggling on wearily in his endeavor to give expression to unfamiliar thoughts, almost physical pain in the set, distressed look of his eyes:

"Punishment for sins committed in former lives—punishment in this life! Ah—ah—a cycle that never ends—like a snake swallowing its tail—a—" He slurred, stopped, moved his sinewy arms up and down, woodenly, clumsily.

"Perhaps," gently suggested Sir Charles—"a wheel of lives—a great wheel of good deeds and bad, M'pwa?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

There was relief in the negro's accents; too, surprise, and boundless respect and admiration.

"You are indeed a most holy man," he continued, "learned and wise. Nothing is hidden from the mirror of your eyes. A wheel of lives—an eternal accounting and reckoning of good and bad deeds! Thus—even thus—sayeth the word that is everywhere, everywhere, all at once! Punishment for sins in former lives—committed in former lives by Double-Dee! Now, for these, in this life, the bitter price—"

And, while M'pwa droned on, with frequent sighs and pauses and vaguely help-

less gestures, telling how the "word that was everywhere" accounted for it all, how the mysterious murders of Double-Dee's agents and the mutilations of their corpses dovetailed to make the "word" reasonable, how, finally, the Warangas, though they loved and respected Double-Dee, were becoming afraid that they, too, might have to share their fate and, therefore, eagerly awaiting another "word" that had been promised them and that would explain how the spirit of the great juju head had left Double-Dee's body to enter somebody else's; while the Arab listened impatiently, and with occasional, deep-throated ejaculations of "*Bismillah!*" and "*Ayawah!*" and "*Allah kureem!*" and "*Insh'allah!*"—Sir Charles Lane-Fox was perfecting a certain theory.

He put it into words, an hour later, when he and Mahmoud Ali Daud were once more on the trek, on the last lap toward the jungle lodge. The moon squinted down sardonically, hostilely, with a red, bleary eye. The forest was about them like a living thing, possessed by the masterful consciousness of its strength, reaching up from below the two men's feet with a somber, tangled mass of undergrowth—seething like evil thoughts, like a nestful of venomous snakes—closing in on them like an implacable foe in a serried mob of immense trees that towered above in a great spread of twisted boughs and extravagant, fantastic creepers—

"Hateful, severe, pitiless!" murmured the Arab as he brushed aside a spiky liana. He felt lonely and small and crushed.

The Englishman laughed a mirthless laugh.

"Not exactly the proper background, it seems to me, for a successful preaching of the Buddhist sages' esoteric thoughts!" he drawled.

The Arab stopped in his tracks—they had come to a sudden clearing where the moon mirrored in a ragged expanse of black slime, caused by recent rainfalls, with, far in the silent west, the afterglow of an incongruously tender sunset.

"Meaning—what, brother-in-the-craft?" he asked, cool, alert, once more the hard-headed, materialistic Semite, the man of

affairs who made his imagination subservient to his common sense.

CHAPTER X.

THE EMISSARY.

SIR CHARLES LANE-FOX smiled. "You Moslems," he began, with that maddeningly academic precision of his which the other knew of old, "are rather a utilitarian lot—even in matters of religion. You are practical, hard-bitten, four-square—"

Mahmoud Ali Daud made an impatient gesture and spoke an impatient word.

But the Englishman continued serenely that—quite so!—all Moslems were alike, brothers under their skin.

"It makes no difference," he said, "if you are soldiers or sailors or priests or explorers or merchants or what-not. You are, every blessed one of you, missionaries, congenital proselytizers. And, as I said, you attend to your converting in a practical, hard-bitten way. You preach a simple, easily digested creed to these Africans. You give them no difficult theological nuts to crack, no extraordinary miracles and all that thaumaturgical bosh to believe in. All you ask them to do, so as to become fitly prepared for Islam, is to stop child murder, to cease worshiping idols, and to regulate divorce in a decent manner."

"I give salaams for the compliment," replied the Arab ironically. "But—" He lifted his eyebrows questioningly.

"We Christians," went on the other, in an even voice, "are also a fairly practical lot. Our missionaries, just like yours, preach a something that can be digested by these savages. Perhaps—unlike you—we are a trifle *too* spiritual, *too* ethical. Still—Christianity can be and has been successfully preached in Africa. Like Islam, it does not attempt to interfere too crassly with the negroes' basic, tribal ethics and their inherited ideas of right and wrong, and—"

"*Bismillah-lah-lah!*" came Mahmoud Ali Daud's deep-throated interruption. He threw up both his hands. "I admire your wisdom! I dote on your learning! I ac-

knowledge you sage among the many sages. But—"

"But," said the Englishman, unruffled, "speaking about yet a third creed—the creed of the Lord Gautama Buddha—"

"Who is speaking of it?"

"I am, my impatient friend! I said that this"—he pointed into the great jungly silence that closed about the clearing like a remorseless wall—"that this is hardly a logical or promising background for the esoteric teachings of the Buddha—"

"Of course not! Who is preaching Buddhism here?"

"Who? Why—the man, or men—or shall we say the Chartered Company—who are trying to instil in the minds of the Warangas the theory of Buddhist incarnation and transmigration of souls, of sins committed in former lives to be punished in this life, of the wheel of things—the pitiless, eternal wheel to which all human lives are tied! The theory which even now is undermining the great firm of Double-Dee, which explains why your agents were murdered, which ultimately will cause the juju head of Mohammed Bello to seek a new abiding-place—ah—perhaps in the pompous, well-fed body of Baron Adrien de Roubaix.

"Why," he went on, a little more excited, "it's clear, isn't it? All that we heard to-night—and which the Waranga chief had such a deuce of a time expressing in his clumsy dialect—why, man, it's Buddhism—pure, unadulterated—and preached for a purpose. Don't you see, Mahmoud?"

"I do. But—"

"But?"

"Baron de Roubaix is a good Catholic!" exclaimed the Arab. "And—the Chartered Company people—there are Protestants among them, and Moslems—and Greek Orthodox—and Jews. Even—may Allah curse them most especially—atheists! But—Buddhists—impossible! Buddhists—in Africa—working for the Chartered Company? As well look for fish on top of a mountain, or drag for the moon reflected in the water!"

"No faith except Buddhism believes in the theory of transmigration, of metempsychosis," insisted the Englishman, "in the

wheel of things! The man at the back of all your trouble, the man who, by underground intrigues, by spreading whispers and rumors wherever he went, perhaps by a wholesale bribing of the medicine-man, has sent forth the word—how did that Waranga chief put it?—yes!—the ‘word that is everywhere, all at once,’ he—”

“He was a clever man! But not a Buddhist! No!” The Arab shook his stubborn head. “A Buddhist—why—that means a Chinaman, or a Japanese, or possibly a Siamese. And I know all the employees of the Chartered Company. There is not a single yellow man among them—”

“Mahmoud!” smiled the Englishman. “At times I am disappointed in you. Chinaman—you say? Jap? Yellow man?”

“What else?”

“Rot! Why—he might be a white man, a Scot or Englishman or American, for all I know—”

“How—then—”

“The Chartered have recruited their people from all the four corners of the earth, from all the seven seas, haven’t they?”

“Yes. The Chartered people are free-lances!”

“Exactly. Free-lances. Buccaneers. Wanderers upon the face of the earth. Surely there may be among their number one who has lived in the Far East a long time—in China, let us say—one who has become familiar with the Buddha’s transcendental wisdom—”

And then the Arab’s sharp interruption:

“There is—by Allah! There is! Witherspoon! ‘Gloucester’ Witherspoon they call him at the coast!”

“Oh—the old chap with the white goatee who curses so picturesquely—has been with the Chartered Company about three years—came up from the south after some incredible adventures of sorts?”

“The same,” said the Arab. “He used to be—how do you say in English?—a Yankee skipper—used to be in the China trade—then in the service of the Chinese government—”

“How do you know?” asked Sir Charles.

“From his own lips,” replied Mahmoud Ali Daud. “Down at De Sousa’s place, he has told me many a story of the Far

East. Too”—and his thin, sensitive lips curled in a lopsided smile—“it appears that there are other tales. African tales. True tales, belike, about ‘Gloucester’ Witherspoon himself. Tales he did *not* tell me—”

“Of course not!” said Sir Charles. “I know. Bitter, reckless, blood-stained tales. Tales of crime and rapine and murder—the dregs of a white man’s passions under southern stars—oh,” he sighed—“tales hard to prove, and—”

He was silent.

At heart he was a simple man who, deep within himself, put the ordinary decencies of life above Magna Charta, above the demands and duties and tangled interests of ever-growing empire. Yet, in the past, there had been many instances when, for reasons of the latter, he had been forced to scotch the former, when the pride and whip of national, racial ambition had compelled him to be deaf to what, with slightly saturnine pathos, he called his “private conscience away from Downing Street’s shadow.”

Thus it had been with the Chartered Company; with their agents—with men like ‘Gloucester’ Witherspoon.

They had committed, were committing, every crime on the rather comprehensive African calendar—nor were these crimes always impossible to prove. But there was the pulling of international wires hither and thither. There was the dread of international misunderstandings and complications. There was the power of foreign chancelleries—and reigning houses—and stock exchanges.

Witherspoon! Sir Charles Lane-Fox had that honest, homespun New England name on several secret files in his private safe—with dates and names and little, dramatic black crosses.

And yet—

Mahmoud Ali Daud read the Englishman’s heart like an open book.

“Perhaps this time—” he said very gently, “if Witherspoon be indeed the man who—”

“If? Heavens! There isn’t even the

margin of doubt. I happen to remember that, through the Chartered Company, he asked me for a special trade permit for the French Congo shortly after you went to Brussels to talk business with Baron de Roubaix. The French Congo runs around the north and northwest of the Waranga country like an arm crooked at the elbow, and the Chartered people are as thick as thieves with all the chiefs up there. It would be a losing game, commercially, to tap the Waranga treasures via the French Congo. The road is too long, too round-about.

"There is a stretch of jungle three hundred miles across that is nearly impassable, and there are three great rivers to cross. But it's a handy enough jumping-off place to start rotten propaganda among the blacks, to disseminate the 'word that is everywhere, all at once.' Well—don't you see?—the whole trouble started the very moment you refused the offer of the baron. He cabled to the coast and—it dovetails, Mahmoud!"

"Then—why—if we can prove it—"

"Even so"—again Sir Charles sighed—"perhaps once more the interests of empire will—"

He slurred, stopped, then went on with unexpected bitterness:

"Compromise! Always compromise! There you have the slogan of Britain! Compromise! Bargain!"

"But a profitable bargain," smiled the Arab, "for the empire!"

"Not to forget Double-Dee!" chimed in the governor with a return to his usual good humor.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT THE DRUMS TOLD.

FOR a long time the two walked, considering the situation from every possible angle.

"Strike while the iron is hot," finally said the Englishman.

"Aye!" rejoined the other, in Oriental metaphor. "A good head has a thousand hands! And two good heads—yours and mine—*wah!*"

And, when the morning sun rose, golden and scarlet, netting the jungle in delicate reddish mist, painting tiny shadows of somber, crushed rose-pink among the tufted grass in the clearing, and sweeping up to the feathery tree-tops with a wild purple saraband of high-lights, they opened the bundles they had carried on their shoulders, plied scissors and razors, handled collapsible mirrors and other toilet accessories that seemed strangely out of place here in the gangrened heart of the Dark Continent, stripped, buried the ragged dervish clothes they had been wearing, washed, then dressed themselves in the clothes they had taken from the bundles: Mahmoud Ali Daud in loose cotton shirt and trousers and a light, voluminous woolen burnoose, fitting the large, fringed kerchief, the *kufiyah*, close to his head with the help of the *aakal*, the twisted rope of camel hair, and projecting it well over the forehead, thus both body and face thoroughly protected against the rays of the sun; Sir Charles Lane-Fox in the creamy, snug uniform laced with gold braid which he wore by right of office—and which he cursed roundly.

"Damn it!" he said, as he hooked the belt with perspiring fingers. "I s'pose it is all right to work for the empire—even to die for it on the field of battle. But why, in the name of all that's holy, should I have to court apoplexy and a heat stroke and all the plagues of ancient Egypt simply because my forefathers have decreed that tight trousers and tunic are the correct thing regardless of the climate?"

Mahmoud Ali Daud laughed; and the two trudged on, the Englishman still swearing and perspiring and nervously fingering his gold-braided collar, the Arab cool and comfortable in the swathing garb of Shem.

A few hours later, in the Waranga kraal on the outskirts of the sacred jungle temple enclosure, half a mile below Double-Dee's chief up-country agency post, the African drums boomed an odd tale into the glaring west, from village to village, spanning river and forest and jungle, on to the coast—where the sounds were caught and interpreted by a native drum-code specialist in the employ of the Chartered Company, and,

having been communicated to Baron Adrien de Roubaix, who was at breakfast, caused him to rise suddenly and upset the cup of steaming coffee at his elbow over his immaculate white linen trousers.

"*Nom d'un nom d'un nom!*"

The baron used decidedly bad language in French and Flemish and English, severely cuffed an unoffending Galla house-boy, who happened to be near, and rushed, hatless, coatless, to the main office of the Chartered Company, where he called the department managers into immediate, confidential conclave:

"Baker! Maillerand! O'Toole! Ali Othman! Lubersac! Van Raalte!"

They came on a run, listened—and remained speechless with chagrin and astonishment, Van Raalte finally crystalizing the prevailing sentiment into one sound Anglo-Saxon syllable:

"Damn!"

For the gossiping drums had boomed forth the news that Sir Charles Lane-Fox had once more done the impossible. While local rumor, aided and abetted by the governor's aide-de-camp acting under final instructions, had him hunting big game not far from the frontier, he had made a sudden and impressive appearance, in the steaming heart of Africa, at the kraal of the sacred juju head.

Like a shooting star sizzling out of the upper ether, he had dropped among the astounded Warangas, not as a footsore traveler, but as a British diplomat, gorgeous in creamy linen and gold braid, embodying in himself all the pomp and glory and circumstance of the empire which he served; accompanied—throbbed the drums—by Mahmoud Ali Daud—and saying that he had come because the "word that was everywhere, all at once," had commanded him, and—

Here, although the drum-code specialist listened close to the sound waves that separated themselves, like the taps of a Morse code, from the accompanying African symphony, the barking of the dogs, the shrill cackling of the house-boys, and the querulous falsetto of the women bending over their cooking pots, the tale of the drum had shut off in mid air.

"What the devil does it mean?" stormed the baron. "Here, Witherspoon!" as the white-bearded Gloucester skipper, who had recently returned from the interior with reports of splendid progress, came into the room. "What does it mean, you—"

He turned to Lubersac, who had given up an honorable berth in the Paris Foreign Office to become the Chartered Company's special adviser on international affairs.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

Lubersac stroked his silken beard.

"Sir Charles has no right up there—"

"Why not?"

"There's the old treaty between England and—"

"Sir Charles has not double-crossed that treaty yet—"

"No—not yet!" chimed in Maillerand, the ironic Parisian expatriate.

"But—*enfin*," cried the baron; "there is no trouble between England and—we would have heard—"

Banng! the drums commenced again; mentioned with thump and thump and double thump that the tale was not yet ended; that even greater things were brewing up-country. For Sir Charles Lane-Fox, even now, was assembling the chiefs and medicine-men in solemn audience. He was taking—said the drums—a small silken flag from his pocket—was holding it high—it was the Union Jack!

Again the drums ceased throbbing, and the baron clenched his fists till the knuckles stretched white.

"No, no!" he cried. "Sir Charles can't get away with that!"

"Crude, isn't it?" smiled Van Raalte.

"Yes. The old treaty holds—and holds tight. The Waranga country is within our sphere of interests—"

"But," suggested Lubersac, "it's still an independent country, you know—"

"Yes. But the old treaty says distinctly that, if ever it should be annexed—by any European power—it's we who have the first right, the first refusal—" He lowered his voice. "Here, Lubersac! A cable to Paris—send it in duplicate to Amsterdam and Brussels—I'll show Sir Charles a thing or two!"

And he dictated for several minutes while, at the same time, a thousand miles inland, Sir Charles Lane-Fox, standing below the grinning juju head of Mohammed Bello, Mahmoud Ali Daud by his side, was finishing his harangue to the Waranga chiefs and medicine-men who surged about him like a plum-colored sea, in all the barbarous regalia of their caste and craft, their bodies smeared with ocher, their faces plastered thickly with white and striped with crimson, their hair carefully trained into fantastic shapes, their forearms clanking with broad brass bracelets, their legs covered from foot to ankle with coils upon coils of copper wire.

"Thus," he said, "O ye chiefs and *um-linos* of the Waranga nation, the word that is everywhere, all at once, has once more spoken the truth. For there is no doubt that Mahmoud Ali Daud has committed the many sins in his former lives—"

"Let us not mention this life!" mumbled the irrepressible Arab.

"Nor," went on the Englishman, "is there a doubt that, tied to the inexorable wheel of things, he must atone for these sins in his present span of life. First came there punishment—harsh, destructive punishment—the killing and mutilating of Double-Dee's agents, the ruining of Double-Dee's business. Now the word that is everywhere, all at once, has spoken to me in the watches of the night, saying that there shall be yet another punishment, that Mahmoud Ali Daud must atone with the deed, too; that he must carry, in the future, that most crushing burden, that most galling of all the chains of slavery called Sovereignty.

"Yes—thus sayeth the word that is everywhere—he must bow his proud neck to the yoke! He must become your Sultan, your Emir, your highest servant, O you men of the Waranga nation! All wrongs he will right. Justice and mercy and prosperity he will bring. Never-ceasing shall be his toil. He will serve you well and faithfully as did, centuries ago, Mohammed Bello, the great Emir, whose sacred head is your powerful juju. Yes! The spirit of Mohammed Bello has left the soul of Double-Dee. It has entered the

soul of Mahmoud Ali Daud. And"—again he waved the small, silken Union Jack—"as representative of the British Empire I give most solemn oath that my country will faithfully protect the rights of this new country, this new Sultanate, ruled by Mahmoud Ali Daud, Emir!"

It was over six weeks later that Sir Charles Lane-Fox was closeted with the two partners of Double-Dee and Baron Adrien de Roubaix.

"Baron," he said, "I don't care how you make your peace with your people at home, how you straighten out that mess you got yourself into with your Foreign Office and your Colonial Office and all the rest of them. I repeat—I shall not recede from my position—"

"But—Sir Charles—the treaty!"

"The treaty says that, in the final division of the African spoils, England gives up all claims to the Waranga country—"

"Well?"

"There is no division of any spoils! England has not annexed one square inch of Waranga territory. The Warangas, out of their own free will, have united their tribes into a Sultanate, have appointed an Arab, a civilized man, as their Emir. We simply were asked by the new Emir"—he bowed to Mahmoud Ali Daud, who bowed in return—"to protect the country against foreign aggression. Loyal to the traditions of empire, of justice, we could not say no!"

"I—I—" blustered the baron.

"Wait!" Sir Charles continued. "If, by any chance, you should feel inclined to pull wires right and left, to make trouble for the new Emir, for Britain, for me—why—I, personally, should be glad—"

"Glad?" Baron de Roubaix was utterly astonished. "Why?"

"Because, for once, I should then be able to disregard the interests of the empire—to follow the call of my own conscience—to"—his voice dropped to a very gentle whisper—"to bring to justice, which means the gallows, one 'Gloucester' Witherspoon, agent of the Chartered Company. And perhaps, baron, perhaps it might also come out during the trial that you yourself—oh—murder of several of Double-Dee's agents

—accessory before the fact—all that sort of thing. *Good morning, baron! You leaving, too, Mahmoud—and you, Donachie? All right. Drop in again—any time.*

Out on the street, the Arab touched the baron's arm.

"Baron," he said, "I am a man of few words. I detest bargaining. My first offer still stands. My partner and I—we are still willing to sell all our African interests—"

"Mahmoud—what—" interrupted Donachie.

"For fifty-one per cent of the Chartered Company stock—for control—"

"Control? Why, man—" said the baron, who at times had a certain sardonic sense of humor, even when directed against himself, "you have control now! Complete control! Control over all the trade of Africa! All right, though. Come along to the office and we'll sign up."

"*Bismillah!*" said the Arab piously.

(The end.)



Horn Rimmed

by Stanley R. Hofflund

BLISTERING heat gripped the desert. In regions reclaimed by canals green heat radiations dazzled the eyes, over the virgin sands yellow radiations blinded them. The sheriff's posse was fried in spirit as well as body. Again the outlaw they pursued had outwitted them, and the five-thousand-dollar reward offered for his capture seemed as far away and elusive as the tantalizing mirage of a cool lake with a tree-lined shore, which decorated the eastern horizon.

"Lots of sense we had, scrapping over the division of that reward," the sheriff growled irritably as he eased his saddle-sore body by slopping far over onto one side of his sweaty pony. "You can't cook a rabbit till you catch him."

Which perfectly reasonable argument produced no enthusiastic response from the five men surrounding him. Jim Morely,

chief deputy and political manager of Sheriff Bailey, wiped his parched, sand-blistered mouth with the back of his hand.

"The trouble is, sheriff," he complained, "that there ain't enough fugitives, and a heap too many man-hunters. Great horned centipedes!"

The exclamation was familiar to all who knew Jim Morely. Its present intonation betokened extreme exasperation.

"We're trippin' each other up in the chase, sheriff," he went on. "With all the local and foreign amateur reward-hunters that are on this job I'm afraid it's going to be almighty hard for us he-men to hog onto that five-thousand-dollar reward. Great horned centipedes!"

The sheriff, a man of well-nourished figure, mopped his face with a bandanna he would in the less strenuous periods of his life have scorned to use for a shoe cloth.

Jim Morely watched with unconcealed contempt his chief's expression of utter discouragement.

"I suppose Ike Boyd is taking it easy now in some new hideout, grinning at us up his sleeve," he muttered. "Great horned centipedes!"

The sheriff stared at him with glassy-eyed anger.

"You and your great horned centipedes make me weary, Jim," he growled. "If you think you can lead this here posse with any better results than I can, go to it."

"Great horned centipedes! Follow me, men! I'll lead you to a drink."

In a cloud of dust the posse raced weary mounts for the near-by desert city of Ditchton and the Plateglass Bar.

And in the Plateglass Bar the posse first became acquainted with the young man from Pasadena, he who wore the monstrous horn-brimmed spectacles of a poet or an artist or a faddist. So prominent a feature as those glasses was alone sufficient to make the man conspicuous in Ditchton. But the thing which most sorely inflamed the posse against him was his order when the sheriff—who never overlooked a political opportunity—invited the entire assemblage to drink at his expense.

The dude with the owlsh eyes called for lemonade!

"And he's come all the way out here from the cool breezes of the Pacific just to be a man-hunter," Jim Morely muttered sarcastically after the barkeeper had whispered in his ear. "Great horned centipedes!"

The young man from Pasadena went on sipping his innocent drink with apparent relish, paying not the slightest attention to unsubdued remarks of a personal nature which in his own city of refinement would have been considered uncouthly rude. He leaned his large, rangy body gracefully upon an elbow he had planted upon the bar. There was a languishing droop about his carriage which belied the splendidly proportioned physique a close, careful inspection would have revealed. But the desert is neither close nor careful.

"Great horned centipedes!" Jim Morely complained as the posse assembled in an ex-

clusive group outside the saloon. "What chance have we got for that five thousand, with millionaires from Pasadena hornin' into our private preserves?"

Attention was diverted by the approach of a dusty stranger who had just dismounted from a horse that must have been sound asleep long before coming to its final halt. Evident weariness and saddle-soreness were in the fellow's gait, but his smile suggested an indefatigable optimism. Jim Morely eyed his approach with heavy despair.

"Great horned centipedes! Again! Ain't that rube with the hard-boiled hat lost yet!"

The approaching optimist was wearing the ridiculously incongruous combination of rancher's overalls and a derby hat that must have come from regions where men are occasionally indoors when the sun shines.

"Great horned centipedes!" Morely exclaimed vindictively as the man without invitation joined the sheriff's group. "Ain't you starved or died of thirst yet? Thought we left you five hours back headed for a dry water-hole up near the sand-dunes."

Sheriff Bailey added gruff inhospitality.

"I ain't changed my mind about you yet," he informed the man. "And, furthermore, I ain't never going to change it. It's no use for you to keep tagging this posse over the desert, like an alfalfa-fed hog trying to hobnob with a herd of mountain goats. I won't appoint you a deputy, and I won't admit you into our party, and—that's final!"

"Great horned centipedes!" Jim Morely favored his chief with a grin of approval.

The man with the incongruous derby hat smiled on with unimpaired optimism. He took a hitch to the oversized overalls he was wearing, cleared the huskiness of exhaustion from his throat, and spoke.

"I just passed a thermometer, sheriff, and saw with my own eyes that the mercury was higher'n a hundred an' twenty-six. Ain't it time us boys had a little drink?"

"Some sense, anyway," Jim Morely admitted with grudging half-approval. Then he led the posse back into the Plateglass Bar to accept the invitation. But an unexpected interruption delayed the party.

After the very sensible architectural custom of desert cities a protecting roof over-

hung the entire sidewalk in front of the saloon. From this shady, well-patronized retreat came a slow, sleepy, perfectly good-natured laugh. The "haw-haw" might have been inspired by happiness immune to heat, pleasing thoughts from within bubbling impulsively forth, or by the remarks of Morely as he led the man of inharmonious costume back to the bar to treat the posse. It was an entirely noncommittal laugh.

It came from within the deep chest of the young man from Pasadena. He was leaning with drooping relaxation against one of the wooden pillars which supported the broad canopy. In one conspicuously clean hand he still held his glass of lemonade, half-emptied.

There was something infectious about that laugh. It thawed the dignity of every member of the posse save its chief, whose stingy sense of humor had been entirely depleted by his recent failures on the trail of the outlaw. And all the others joined in the laugh, with the exception of the man with the derby hat, who undoubtedly thought he was being not only laughed at, but laughed at again. For the prevalent headgear of cities can never be received with dignity when worn with the overalls, shirt, and high boots of a farmer.

But he seemed to decide after one withering glance of contempt upon the young man from Pasadena that one who would be guilty of wearing such monstrous, horn-rimmed spectacles as those could be nothing but an imbecile. With impressive dignity he tightened his hard-boiled hat upon his head, and proceeded with his duties as host at the bar.

After the party had once again eased its thirst the young man from Pasadena approached the sheriff. His address was direct and businesslike.

"You are sheriff of this county, aren't you?"

The sheriff was visibly hostile.

"I am, sir. What business is that of yours?"

"What business of mine is your business?"

The horn-rimmed glasses sought the ceiling for a moment, then came down

to return the sheriff's baleful glare without flinching.

"I merely wanted to offer you my services as a member of your posse."

"Great horned centipedes!" As usual Jim Morely spoke for his chief in a crisis. Belligerently, fists on hips, he faced the young man from Pasadena. But the young fellow kept his horn-rimmed gaze steadfastly upon the sheriff.

"I'd like to make it easy for you to win that five-thousand-dollar reward, you know."

"Great horned centipedes!"

"Shut up, Jim!" The sheriff had gathered his scattered senses. "I'll attend to this—this gentleman."

"Thanks." The young man smiled faintly. "My name is Giddings—Clarence Van Fleet Giddings. I'm from Pasadena, you know. I'm not acquainted with any influential people in this town, but—"

"That's because of them windshields you wear, young fellow," Morely interrupted insultingly. "Folks over here have never seen them worn on anything but an automobile. Perhaps our influential people think you're only parked here."

Over this sally the young man from Pasadena gulped thrice, his face perfectly blank. Whether he wanted to fight or laugh he did not reveal. He was evidently determined to concentrate his mind upon joining the sheriff's posse.

"Of course, sheriff," he went on persuasively, "I don't want to be selfish about that reward. You local people here have worked mighty hard to earn it, and to me it seems only fair to share it with you."

The sheriff gasped without words; his chief deputy put worlds of astonishment into his "Great horned centipedes!" The assurance of this owl-eyed stranger was truly staggering.

"If you will deputize me," Clarence Van Fleet Giddings went on in a tone of absolute honesty of purpose, "I will guarantee to lead you straight to Ike Boyd, the train-robber you seem to be unable to find."

Desert-bred nature could not endure such a strain as this. The sheriff's face twitched spasmodically. Jim Morely nervously fingered a weapon at his hip. Of course it

was the deputy who exploded first; his feelings were pent up in a less thick shell.

"Great horned centipedes! Young man, you ain't safe here! Ain't you got a mother back in Pasadena?"

The giddy onlookers saw the young man from Pasadena extract from the pocket of an immaculate silk shirt a perfectly clean linen handkerchief. Such an object alone would have attracted instant curiosity in dusty Ditchton. With it he proceeded to gently caress his eyes, from which he removed his spectacles. It was as though the young man sought to counteract tears.

"I'm an orphan," he confessed dejectedly.

"Great horned centipedes!" Morely shuddered convulsively. "Ain't you even got a nurse?"

A faint smile lighted the sad visage of the young man from Pasadena. He replaced his glasses and, through them, contemplated the chief deputy with astonishing frankness.

"I've got a girl back in Pasadena," he confessed; "but I just can't bear to go back to her without getting what I came after. I want to be deputized."

"Great horned centipedes!"

Roars of laughter filled the barroom; men who had grown gloomy and irritable from weary days of futile reward-hunting found welcome relief in mirth at the expense of this human curiosity who had so innocently strayed to Ditchton. The man with the derby hat which clashed so inartistically with the rest of the scheme of his costume was noisiest in his glee. Perhaps it pleased him inordinately to be laughing instead of laughed at in a scene of barroom man-baiting.

"When I came here all the way from Mesa County to hunt for that five thousand dollars," he shouted above the din, "I didn't reckon I'd run up against competition like this."

Morely laughed with the rest, but there was now little real humor in his laughter. He was itching for trouble. His desert instincts, every sturdy one of them, were being ruthlessly outraged by the young man from Pasadena. Yes, every word, movement, and expression of face of the dude

with the owlish eyes had grown to be a challenge, a chip on the shoulder to Jim Morely.

The young man from Pasadena sipped his lemonade and gazed with untroubled eyes through his horn-framed windows.

Sunset was rapidly approaching, and it was time for the posse to resume stern business. The sheriff and his chief deputy relieved some of their pent-up feelings by roughly refusing local man-hunters who would have attached themselves to the official party. The man with the misplaced derby hat was inhospitably advised to go back to Mesa County. The sheriff bestowed a farewell admonition upon the young man from Pasadena.

"This ain't no job for you, young feller. This here hunting of a desp'rit outlaw like Ike Boyd, a killer if there ever was one, is a job for he-men."

The young man from Pasadena cast his goggled eyes over the assemblage, smiled, and replied:

"There seems to be plenty of he-men in the hunt, sheriff."

"Entirely too many," the sheriff agreed testily.

His chief deputy spoke up with withering sarcasm.

"Great horned centipedes! Why don't you, Clarence, attach yourself to this here gentleman from Mesa County? Seems to me you two fellers are just natural born pals for a man-hunt."

The crowd laughed. The gentleman in question tilted his ridiculous hat at a pugnacious angle and frowned angrily. The young man from Pasadena looked him over with cool, horn-rimmed appraisal.

"By Jove! That's a good idea, really!"

It was the first display of anything resembling enthusiasm on the part of the young man from Pasadena. The crowd was immensely pleased.

"I'm sorry for that outlaw, Ike Boyd," Jim Morely said. "What chance will he have against a combination of Clarence's eyes and a head like this one from Mesa County?"

"I'm sorry for him, too," declared the young man from Pasadena. In his voice was a pity too real to be feigned. It spoke

of penitentiaries and long sentences, of hard labor and degradation.

"And I'm sorry for you, too, sheriff, and your posse, and all these others."

"Great horned centipedes! Let's go!"

"Shall we go, too?" The young man from Pasadena gazed inquiringly into the eyes glaring murderously upon him from beneath a derby hat. The man from Mesa County blasphemously resented this most colossal of all the insults he had received. The scornful heat of his utterance was withering.

"What do you take me for! Do you think I'd pair off with a four-eyed, lemon-sucking dude like you?"

"What do I take you for?" The young man from Pasadena put the question quietly enough, but his rangy body seemed to be gathering itself as though for speed.

"Yes, what do you take me for?"

"For five thousand dollars. That's what I take you for, Ike Boyd!"

With dazzling swiftness, utterly unexpected of him, Clarence Van Fleet Giddings snatched off his horn-rimmed spectacles and tossed them across the bar. With an agile spring too rapidly executed for the human eye to fully follow, he hurled himself upon the man with the derby hat. A stiff, short jab with a well-trained right arm landed upon the jaw of the victim of this astonishing assault.

That jolt sent a derby hat spinning through the air.

"I forgot to take my gun with me, Ike Boyd," the young man from Pasadena remarked easily as he pinioned his prisoner within an iron embrace of long, sinewy arms.

"But I guess I won't need it against a cheap crook like you," he added as he deftly plucked his prisoner's weapon from its holster.

The expression of fear that froze the features of the man who had said he came from Mesa County convicted him in the eyes of the posse and the astonished crowd. No verbal confession could have better identified Ike Boyd. Introduced with such convincing assurance, every man-hunter in the saloon quickly tallied him up with the description upon the widely placarded offer

of a five-thousand-dollar reward for his capture.

"Here's your outlaw, sheriff," the young man from Pasadena announced with a grin. "I call on every man in this room to witness that I arrest Ike Boyd and claim the reward!"

Out of the tense stillness of stupefaction came a voice.

"Great horned centipedes! And who are you?"

"Who am I?" The young man from Pasadena chuckled as he watched Sheriff Bailey snap handcuffs upon the wrists of Ike Boyd. Even the prisoner, white and trembling from the unexpected ending of the clever game of elusiveness in which he had been posing as a man-hunter, gazed at the young fellow with frightened interrogation.

"I'm only a passenger from the train Ike Boyd robbed," said the young man from Pasadena.

He laughed a satisfied laugh.

"When that fellow held up the train he got a lot of fun out of me because I tried to hide some rings my wife was wearing. She's the girl back in Pasadena I told you about."

The prisoner's jaw had dropped wide open.

"Ike Boyd made me do a lot of silly things before my wife," the young man went on. "First he took most of my clothing from me; then he made me dance. Just out of sheer bravado and meanness."

He sighed sentimentally.

"And all this occurred on my honeymoon trip, right before my new wife!"

He darted a keen glance toward the cowering prisoner.

"I knew I'd recognize you if I ever saw you again, Ike Boyd," he said. "And when I heard you were down here making a reputation for elusiveness I followed up a hunch."

He smiled whimsically.

"I certainly didn't expect to find you wearing that hat."

He reached forth and plucked from the polished bar, where a bystander had placed it, the derby head-piece. For a moment he gazed upon it fondly, tenderly. That it had

become hopelessly dented and soiled did not seem to diminish his affection for it.

"My honeymoon hat," he explained to the crowd. "Ike Boyd swiped it from me on that train, along with my self-respect and my heroism in the eyes of my bride. I'll take it back to Pasadena along with the five-thousand-dollar reward, to show Molly that if Ike Boyd did grab my scalp

right under her nose I didn't let him get away with it."

His chuckle rippled through the room.

Jim Morely bestowed upon the young man from Pasadena a gaze that was none the less sincere in its admiration because it was also frankly crestfallen. Jim's tribute was unstinted.

"Great horn-rimmed centipedes!"



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

WHENEVER there's a verdant plot
Where folks collect en masse,
You'll see somewhere about the spot
The sign "Keep off the Grass!"

The wrappings off of chewing gum
And chocolate one sees
Profusely, if he chance to come
Where reads "No Rubbish Please!"

That peanut man looks fat and fine,
As well as do his pals,
Whose stand is nearest to the sign
"Don't feed the Animals!"

A stately wall bears many a scar,
Initialed in disgrace,
Where nearabouts plain-written are
The words "Do Not Efface!"

Likewise more empty shotgun shells
Are always to be found
Where some rude board most surely tells
"No Hunting on This Ground!"

More motor cars to each square foot,
Can crowd into a space
Where, on a post, some one has put
"This is No Parking Place!"

Since rules are only made to break,
Why don't sign men disguise
Their little boards awhile, and make
Them read contrariwise?

To wit: What folks are meant to "not"
Write out the words "Please Do!"
And if you'd populate a spot,
"Keep Out! and This Means You!"

Sophie E. Redford.

A Daughter of the White Star by Horace Howard Herr

Author of "With a Crew of Skeletons," "The Stop This Side Eternity," etc.

CHAPTER VII.

HU-LI, THE FOX.

THE Chinamen, swaying unsteadily in the doorway, did not impress me as a formidable bar to liberty. In my school days I enjoyed some fame as an amateur boxer and my years in the open had equipped me with strength and endurance which probably would not be suspected by one who attempted to estimate my prowess from my general appearance. I felt reasonably confident a feint at the Chinaman's head and a blow straight over to his stomach would put him out of the way. The other ruffian looked as if he might prove a tough customer in a rough-and-tumble battle.

It was no time to hesitate. There was no reason to doubt that some of the invaders would be breaking through from the rear of the old shack and, in that event, I might have to deal with a half-dozen heathens instead of two. If only I could have tossed aside the dinner-bucket and been free to use both hands I believe I could have given a much better account of myself.

Another step toward the door the last vestige of uncertainty as to the intentions of the rough-looking patron was removed.

"Just hand over that pail," he ordered, "and beat it while your hide is safe!"

I held out the pail, not too far in front

of me and just as his hand closed over the pail I jerked it toward me with as much force as I could command without slowing down the right-hand hook aimed at his jaw. The blow landed with enough power behind it to jolt back the fellow's head.

My plan of battle was to improve the second or two of confusion resulting to my opponent when my fist encountered his face, by swinging upward with the dinner-bucket and striking him in the abdomen. I hoped to be able to knock the breath out of him and, perhaps, I should have been successful in this line if the bucket had been stronger. Unfortunately, when I jerked the bucket just as the ruffian closed his hand over the bail, the latter pulled out of the little sockets which held it on either side of the bucket and I held in my hand only the heavy wire bail. The bailless bucket fell to the floor.

With the quickness of a well-trained football player the hop-head Chinaman fell on the bucket, gathered himself and started toward the kitchen. As I was not so much bent on whipping the bruiser as I was in getting out of the den with a dinner-bucket which I knew contained the fifty thousand dollars for which the Daughter of the White Star had sent me, I jumped away from my first opponent and took up the pursuit of the second, giving very little thought to the possibilities once I was in the rear of the

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 28,

building. In a saner moment, perhaps, I would have realized that this was a supreme folly.

I caught up with the fleeing Chinaman just as he was going through the door to the kitchen and lunged forward, taking him around the knees. It is said that the giant Antæus gained strength each time he was thrown to the earth, and Hercules, when wrestling with him, had to lift him off the ground and strangle him in the air. That may be a myth, but I realize now what a mistake it was to throw that Chinaman to the floor and to take the tumble with him. He seemed to break into a dozen pieces, each a full-grown Chink bent on seeing to it that I remain at the bottom of the pile notwithstanding the violence I did to a half-dozen pigtailed which I tried to pull out by their roots.

There wasn't a great deal of breath left in me when the Chinks began to climb off the pile and, even if I had not realized that resistance was futile, the fight had gone out of me and the hop-head had undisputed possession of the dinner-bucket.

My expectation that they would make away with the bucket and leave me to go about my business was not to be realized. I was rolled over on my face, my hands tied behind me, raised to my feet and quickly blindfolded and dragged from the building. Of course I had no idea as to the direction we were going. It seemed to me we were in the open air for just a minute or two before we entered some sort of building in which was a strong-coffee odor. We went down a few steps and I heard several heavy doors open and close, and we were in a damp, foul-smelling passageway, so narrow that at times I brushed against the side walls.

We climbed two flights of stairs, finally, and after halting several times while doors were opened or closed, we entered what proved to be a rather large and well-furnished room. Here I was searched very carefully and, this pleasantry having been perpetrated to the satisfaction of all present except myself, the cloth which had served as both blind and gag was removed, and I had an opportunity to view my surroundings and captors.

Everything in the room, including the three men who seemed to be my guard of honor, suggested the Oriental taste. The only inharmonious detail was the battered dinner-bucket which stood on a low stand just behind which was a pudgy brass god. There was an abundance of Chinese pictures on the walls which, under other circumstances, might have been more interesting. My chief concern being to hasten my departure from the place, I paid more attention to the plans of the room than to its ornamentation. There were no windows and but one door. An unusual number of mirrors, large and small, were either hung on or set in the walls and ceiling. I immediately suspected they were so arranged that it was possible for a person stationed at some point of vantage outside the room, to observe all that went on in the room without being seen.

I have mentioned the pudgy brass god which was the most prominent thing in one end of the room. It was not a small object by any means. The figure was seated cross-legged on a mat and from the base to the crown the figure was at least as tall as I, which would make it about six feet. It was altogether vicious as to facial expression. When my captors removed the blind from my eyes one of the motley crew was lighting a taper in something resembling a candlestick just in front of the unpleasant-looking monument to heathen superstition.

When I had made a hasty appraisal of my surroundings I turned my attention to my captors and discovered that one of the three was my fat-faced, smiling messenger who had stopped me in the street and told me that Tao Tang requested my return to the restaurant.

"You clome black, all litee!" he exclaimed when he saw that I recognized him. There was a suave taunt in his words and his smile aroused in me a most determined desire to see how far in his fat face I could thrust my fist.

"What do you mean by this kind of an outrage?" I asked in genuine anger. "If you know what is good for you, you'll see that I am returned at once to the street."

"Oh, you all litee. Plenty mad. Maybe

so, pletty sloodn feel bletter," he cooed in his broken English.

"Maybe so, pretty soon you will feel much worse," I threatened, determined to make good on the threat if I caught up with even half an opportunity. "What do you want with me, here?"

"Hu-Li, he likee talk with you pletty qulick," the glib Chink replied. "Mably you and him catch 'em dlinner toglether from bucket. You tired? Mlake you allee samee at home."

He moved toward the door and his two companions followed. They passed out ahead of him, but he did not tarry in the room long enough for me to get my hands on him. He passed out behind the other two and closed the door.

Feeling sure I was being watched by eyes other than those of the brass god, I affected a lack of interest in my surroundings, dropped on the low couch which stood at the end of the room opposite the fat idol and, taking what solace I could from the last cigarette in my case, awaited the pleasure of Hu-Li.

When my captors went from the room they left the dinner-pail on the stand, and I will not deny that I experienced an impulse to open it and ascertain its exact contents. I had no doubt the money was in bills of large denomination, but even so there was no possibility of my being able to conceal them where they would not be found.

Having no idea as to where I was it was quite useless to weary my mind with wild thoughts of a dash for liberty. It was a plain case of being completely at the mercy of my captors who, I had every reason to believe, were a hard set and not disposed to hesitate at murder if murder best served their purpose. I had some curiosity to meet Hu-Li, but not so much curiosity that I would have remained to keep the engagement if there had been any way I could have deserted the place.

I did not know then as I do now that it is an Oriental trait to play for mental advantages where there is something at stake in a conversation or interview. If I had understood this trait I would have refrained from growing impatient and irri-

tated over the long delay, although I could not have forestalled my discomfiture growing out of my failure to meet myself at a dinner-table.

By eight o'clock in the evening I was desperately hungry and thoroughly angry. My anger probably kept me from satisfying my hunger, but believing that I was being watched to see if I would look in the dinner-bucket, I was determined not to touch it. If Hu-Li had deferred his arrival a half-hour longer I believe my determination on this score would have vanished, for I had arrived at that place where I was thinking in terms of ham sandwiches and doughnuts when the Fox arrived.

He came in almost noiselessly through a narrow door across the room from the larger door through which my captors had departed. I haven't the least idea how a Chinaman would describe Hu-Li's costume; it may have been a royal robe for all I know, but it looked to me like a pair of yellow pajamas, a red night-cap and red sandals with wooden soles. There was an abundance of fancy work on his comic-opera clothes, the predominant design being that of a three-legged dragon, which seemed to be trying to swallow itself. My first good look at his face convinced me I had seen him before. The stringy, drooping mustache and the corners of the mouth drawn down reminded me of a catfish; the eyes also were intelligent like those of a fish.

Hu-Li looked no more human in his yellow pajamas than he had appeared in the dress-suit that afternoon when I saw him come out of the Oriental bazaar near the hotel and ride away in an automobile. I wondered whether or not I could hit him hard enough to knock him out with one blow. I should have made this experiment as a measure of satisfaction for my outraged feelings if I could have arrived at a conclusion as to what I should do in the event my attack was successful.

I have said there was but one door in the room and I have contradicted that statement by relating how the Fox came in through a narrow door opposite the larger one through which my captors had departed several hours before. As a matter of

fact, when these doors were closed, there was nothing to indicate the presence of even one door, and the unexpected arrival of the Fox through what had seemed to be but a panel of the highly decorated wall, convinced me that I was in no ordinary room and that, doubtless, the walls, floor, and ceiling concealed devices calculated to aid and expedite most any kind of villainy suggesting itself to Oriental minds.

Hu-Li faced me with the stand on which was the dinner-bucket between us. His fishlike countenance was distorted by something he may have intended for a smile.

"You are a new recruit," he began as he produced an ivory cigarette-case from the folds of his jacket, "and I am glad to meet you."

He spoke excellent English and his composure was perfect.

"Not a recruit, but a prisoner," I retorted. "If you are a man of some authority about this place, may I suggest that it is in the interest of you and your friends that I be conducted to the street at once."

He held out to me the cigarette-case, but having in my mind a recent experience with cigarettes, I curtly declined his invitation. He smiled and said:

"They are quite harmless, I assure you."

"And my experience justifies a lack of confidence in your words," I replied.

"The word of Hu-Li is accepted even by his enemies," he said rather sullenly. "When I say to a man, 'You are safe,' no harm comes to him; when I say, 'You are near the end,' the end is not far away. If you were older in your association with the enemies of the Chosen of Heaven you would not have to be told this."

"I am associated with neither the Chosen of Heaven nor the Selected of Hell," I said hotly. "I am an American citizen and know very well how to avail of the law to protect myself against this outrage."

"You were aware that you were mixing in an affair of no concern to American citizens when you called for this." Hu-Li smiled as he touched the battered dinner-bucket.

"It is altogether my own affair where I have my dinner-pail filled and what I have placed in it," I retorted.

"Why attempt a bluff?" Hu-Li asked bluntly. "I know and you know what is in this bucket. Nothing is to be gained by pretending. We will pour the cards on the table and you may explain to me, if you will, your exceptional appetite."

He picked up the battered bucket, pulled off the lid and dumped the contents on the stand.

"Just tell me—" Hu-Li did not finish. He looked carefully at the pile of doughnuts and sandwiches, poked at them with the lid of the bucket. There was nothing in the pile other than might be expected in a bucket luncheon, and my first thought was that some one had removed the money. That would have been very easy during the scrimmage in the eating-house or during the time I was blindfolded and I would have had no knowledge of it. It flashed on my mind that this had been done, and Hu-Li was now trying to trick me into some compromising expression of surprise. If that was the purpose, it failed. I said nothing.

Hu-Li removed the cap from the lid of the bucket. As I have mentioned, the lid of the bucket was, in fact, a rectangular compartment in which to carry coffee, or whatever liquid one might care to have with his luncheon. Hu-Li poured from the little vat into the brass cuspidor the coffee which Tao Tang had provided and found nothing extraordinary. Finally he tossed the empty lid on the stand, looked at me from beneath drawn brows and in impatient accent asked:

"Well, where's the money?"

"Money?" I repeated.

"You will get no place with this pretending," he continued. "You were sent to Tang's for money. It was delivered to you in this bucket. Where is it?"

"You have a vivid imagination," I countered, trying to laugh at him. "Surely you will not expect me to be an authority on what was or was not in this bucket when it was taken from me by a gang of thieves and ruffians. You know, of course, that I was brought here blinded. What was put in that bucket or taken from it during that time, I haven't the least idea."

Hu-Li turned his back on me and walked

to the fat, brass god. I could not see what he did there other than place both his hands on the base of the ugly statue. The floor of the room moved suddenly to the left so that I had to take two quick steps to the right to maintain my balance. The walls and ceiling remained stationary while the floor and the furniture on it, including the pudgy brass god, moved around until, assuming I was facing east before this disconcerting development, I was facing west when the floor stopped. As soon as the motion ceased a panel in the wall directly behind me slid up so silently that I was not aware of this development until the fat-faced messenger who had caused my return to the restaurant stepped in the room.

Hu-Li and the messenger engaged in an animated conversation in Chinese and, since the messenger stepped to the stand and inspected the bucket and its contents, I have no doubt but that the conversation had to do with the disappointing character of the bucket's contents. Hu-Li finally dismissed the messenger, and when the panel had slipped silently into place he turned to me.

"You are not going from this place until you tell me what you did with the money," he said. "How soon you have your liberty depends altogether on your choice in the matter."

"If there was money in that bucket," I protested in all honesty, "I have not seen it. It is, therefore, impossible for me to say what I did with it, for I have not had it."

"Perhaps your memory is at fault," Hu-Li sneered. "You will have time to improve it. We do not, of course, feed our enemies. If you die of starvation it will be your own fault."

His manner was altogether intolerable. I started toward him and he quickly faced the pudgy brass god, placing his hands on the base of the statue. Again the floor shot to the left with such a jump as all but threw me to the floor. The centrifugal force threw me against a wall; the wall being stationary I was knocked to the floor and whirled about as if I were on a merry-go-round. The motion ceased as suddenly as it had commenced, and before I could get to my feet, Hu-Li, without so much as

looking back at me, stepped from the room through one of those panels which opened and closed with the silence of a graveyard.

When I went into collision with the wall my head struck heavily against the frame of one of the many mirrors. A small gash was cut in my forehead just over my right eyebrow. It bled profusely and my head ached. I was hungry also and dominated by such anger as I never before had experienced and hope never again to meet with. If I could have placed my hands on Hu-Li at that moment I would have killed him.

I flung myself on the couch, trying to devise some way of wrecking this merry-go-round room and escaping. I began to wonder what had become of the money. I felt sure that one of Hu-Li's ruffians had taken the swag. In that event I hoped he would make way with it, because I felt that it would be better for him to have it, since it was not to be sent to the cause for which the Daughter of the White Star was working, than to have it fall into the hands of the enemy.

Gradually I began to think more of the Daughter of the White Star and less of the failure of my mission. The air in the room was heavy with a delightful odor. I stretched out on the couch and began to dream. I awoke only when I saw the Daughter of the White Star standing on the bank of a willow-fringed stream, and heard her calling me.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY FALLS BELOW PAR.

I HAD been in an unnatural sleep. My watch had stopped and I had not the least idea how long I had been unconscious or what had transpired in the room. Both the dinner-bucket and the luncheon which had been dumped on the stand, had been removed.

Of course, the Daughter of the White Star had not been standing on the bank of a stream. Both the vision of her and the sound of her voice were but episodes in a series of pleasant dreams resulting, no doubt, from the influence of the perfumed

air which had deprived me of whatever little wit and wisdom I may have when in full possession of my mental faculties.

The effects of the gas had not worn off entirely, and I would have dropped back to sleep for another forty winks if my sluggish brain had failed to be interested in a peculiar tapping on the wall to my left.

On several occasions I have found it necessary to drive a nail in a plastered wall and, in order to make sure of striking the studding, I have taken the hammer and tapped along the wall. The sounds which now held my drowsy attention reminded me of that operation.

Finally my curiosity was aroused sufficiently to prompt me to investigate. I got up from the couch slowly and unsteadily, for I found that I had far from complete control of myself. I staggered to the little stand on which the dinner-bucket had been placed when first I found myself in the room, stood there for fully a minute, listening. The tapping was on the outside of the left wall and toward the end of the room in which the pudgy brass god squatted on his throne. I moved nearer the wall and the tapping ceased. I moved along the wall to the corner of the room and turned the angle toward the brass god. When I was a step or two from it I began to realize that it was radiating heat. I held my hand toward it and did not have to touch the metal to realize that it was hot.

It was all very baffling to me in my condition of semistupor. I remember a semblance of amusement taking possession of me on my arriving at the conclusion that the Chinks had combined religion and utility and were using their brass god for a radiator, or the radiator for a brass god. I was troubled a little with the thought that it was a season of the year when heat is not essential to comfort, but my mind being dominated by curiosity over the tapping I had heard, this incongruous circumstance of heat in late summer, soon passed from my thought.

Perhaps I should have made some interesting discovery regarding the noise I had heard if my investigation had not been terminated by the arrival of two whelps from the Fox's pack. They entered the

room through another panel which opened in an unexpected place behind the couch on which I had been sleeping and their appearance was quite astonishing.

Both wore trunks only, being naked to the waist and from the feet to the knees. They looked as if they might be coming in for a wrestling or boxing bout. Passing on either side of me they went across the room to the brass god, one on either side of it, and after going through several comic opera stunts they drew up in front of me.

That despicable fat-faced messenger was one of them and his countenance still was decorated by that aggravating smile.

"What is the big idea?" I asked.

I cannot begin to murder the English language as he murdered it; but, from the remains, I was able to recognize enough to convince me that Hu-Li had sent his slaves to receive my confession as to what had become of the money which was supposed to have been in that old dinner-bucket.

"Hu-Li say you swear bly glate Buddha," grinned the fat face.

Not only was I quite willing to swear by the great Buddha, but I would have eagerly and earnestly sworn at Hu-Li if he had been present.

"I know nothing about this money you men keep mentioning," I insisted, feeling a deep reluctance to using the dignified term "men" for such heathen.

"You swear," grinned the fat face, and the two Chinks, either of whom weighed not less than one hundred and eighty pounds, took me by the shoulders and moved me toward the brass god.

It was then that I realized its eyes glowed with heat like molten metal and the brass had taken on that bluish tint which characterizes metal heated to a high temperature. As soon as we faced the ugly thing I could feel the heat radiating from it.

One of the statue's hands was extended, palm up. A serpent of metal coiled about the wrist, disappearing under the hand and appearing again between the thumb and the first finger. The serpent's head laid flat in the palm of the hand and such was the workmanship that, affected by the heat, the green eyes of the reptile sparkled brilliantly.

"You no catch 'em money, you put 'em hand on Buddha hand. Tell 'em truth, no get 'em burn."

With this explanation the fat-faced heathen took my left arm, the one next to him, extended my hand toward the upturned palm of that pudgy brass god. There was no doubt but that the second my hand touched the metal it would cook the flesh. I jerked back my arm. The ruffian on my right at once stepped in front of me and took hold of my left arm and the two forced me toward the machine of torture. Just as they were pressing my hand home on the scorching palm of Buddha I made a frantic lunge backward and saved myself.

Again they pulled me toward the hand. To begin with I was not in possession of my full strength and the short season of violent struggle had weakened me until I could not resist. I tried to brace myself for the spasm of pain I knew would strike me in another second. I believe I shut my eyes; at any rate, I ceased to struggle and yet the struggle went on.

It seemed, indeed, as if one of the men was trying to force down my hand while the other forced it up. I opened my eyes. The fat-faced heathen's hands were fixed on the underside of my left arm. There was no doubt about it, he was shoving my hand away, each time his companion pressed it near the scorching palm; also the fat-faced heathen seemed to be working me around so that his companion would be completely in front of me and between me and the brass god. I was not sure of this. It seemed that way to me.

Suddenly, just as if I had ceased pulling away and lunged forward, my body went against the heathen between me and the statue and with such force as to throw his face and bare chest against the sizzling, hot metal of the idol. Involuntarily I attempted to step back so that the unfortunate fellow could escape from between my body and the statue; but, somehow, the fat-faced messenger was holding me and I had to make a second and very determined effort before the groaning heathen could drop away to the floor, where he rolled over and over in great pain.

Exclaiming in Chinese the fat-faced mes-

senger, the aggravating smile on his face, thrust me violently to one side and went to the assistance of his injured companion. For the moment I forgot that the fellow had tried to force my hand onto the hot hand of the idol and was about to join the fat-faced messenger in trying to minister to the suffering man when there was a scraping noise directly behind me and I turned to discover a panel being pushed up from the floor.

Naturally I imagined that the burned Chinaman's cries of pain had aroused others and that some of his clan were coming in to see if they could be of assistance. When the panel had been shoved up from the floor a distance of about four feet, the man beyond it stooped and looked in.

He was not a pleasant sight or a reassuring one! His face seemed to be smeared with tar and blood. His hands were covered with tar and in one he held a knife that was about as vicious-looking as one would care to see. Such clothes as he wore were American rather than Chinese and were ragged and smeared with dirt and tar.

Realizing I would be powerless against this dirty ruffian who, I had no doubt, would prove an expert with his vicious-looking blade, I cast one glance about the room for a chair, or some piece of furniture with which to defend myself.

It was never intended, I am sure, that a person entertained in this strange room should defend himself. There was nothing that could be turned to account in a struggle. I looked back at the unpleasant spectacle and feeling sure the time had come when I would be forced to fight for my life, I was in the very act of rushing the invader, if he can be called such, in a desperate hope that I might kick him out of the fight before the fat-faced messenger could get to me, when I was all but paralyzed with astonishment.

"Quick, Mr. Munford! Through here!"

It was Kim Wong's even-pitched voice and the quiet eyes in the tar-smeared, blood-stained face were Kim Wong's eyes.

I am of the opinion that the fat-faced messenger, attending his groaning companion, was unaware that the panel had been opened or that an intruder had appeared

until Kim Wong spoke. However that may be, he seemed as astonished as I, and in this circumstance rested whatever hope there was in the situation for me.

"Come!" Kim exclaimed, and I literally leaped toward the opening in the wall.

At the same instance the fat-faced messenger started up and after me. I did not tarry to see what happened in the room, but as I bent down to pass through the opening I looked back under my right arm and was sure that my pursuer tripped in jumping across the prostrate form of his companion and fell in such fashion as sank his knees violently into the fellow's stomach. Kim pulled me ruthlessly through the opening and shoved down the panel.

I had time for only a quick glance about me, but saw at once that the room in which I had been a prisoner was but a square room built within a circular one. The line of each wall of the square room with the circular shell outside of it formed something corresponding to a geometrical segment. I made this observation as Kim was rushing me toward an opening in the floor and explaining to me that I was to press my knees and arms outward against the sides of the tube into which he was directing me to lower myself.

This tube was no more than three feet in diameter, lined with copper sheeting. From the opening in the floor it dropped sheer for three or four feet and then led off on an angle. I had not the least idea for what it was devised unless for a fire-escape, and I had no thought as to where it would land me. Kim Wong, having seized both my hands in his tar-covered fists and thereby transferred some of the tar to my own hands, again warned me to regulate my speed by pressing my knees and arms outward against the sides of the tube, to keep my head back in line with my body, and told me to go.

I needed no urging, but slipped off the floor into the tube and shot downward in the dark. My tar-smeared hands came near getting me in trouble. I was too eager to put on the brakes and pressed so hard against the sides of the tube with my hands, the tar taking hold so promptly, that the friction came near tearing the flesh from

my fingers before I could ease up on the pressure on my hands and make more use of my knees.

It is of course most difficult to judge distances under such circumstances. I had shot down thirty or forty feet when the pipe took a sudden turn. An instant later I flashed by a streak of daylight, took a drop straight down for five or six feet when my feet began to go out from under me again until finally I was traveling horizontally, feet first, and the momentum gathered in the downward flight was rapidly spending itself. Just as I began to fear that I would stop in the tube I slipped out as gently as you please, landing in what acted and felt like mud, though I could not be sure because of the darkness.

I could see nothing, but felt about until I found the wall at my left, crawled up alongside of it and waited for Kim. He was so long in arriving that I began to fear that in remaining behind until I should have had time to clear the opening of the tube, our enemies had rallied and seized him.

As a matter of fact Kim Wong had crawled up this tube, an almost impossible task, in order to reach the room in which I was held and, knowing each twist the tube made, he had followed me down to where the tube made the first turn and there, by exerting the pressure of his knees, hands, and arms, had held himself until he knew that I had cleared the opening below.

I believed that I have remarked on the development of Kim's shoulders. In the arms, shoulders, and neck he was, I am ready to assert without reservation, the strongest man I have met. I did not attempt to climb up the tube, but I realize what a job it would be since one would have to exert enough pressure against the sides of the tube to prevent falling back and, in addition, lift one's self, or, rather, shove one's self up inch by inch, by pressing down and out on the smooth surface of the tube.

I lived to witness Kim execute another similar feat which made this one look like child's play, and if it had not been for the supernatural strength in those arms and shoulders the unfortunate Chink who had

been burned on the statue of Buddha would have taken a very complete revenge on me, although I now assert in all seriousness and earnestness, that I was not, intentionally, to blame for the injuries which came to the fellow who was doing his utmost to torture me.

Kim produced a flashlight, which revealed the fact that we were in a damp, muddy and narrow tunnel which extended along a concrete foundation wall. The tube through which we had arrived came through from the other side of the wall. I could hear the sound of running water and the odor in the tunnel was anything but pleasant. As Kim led the way the sound of running water grew fainter and by the time our progress was blocked by what seemed to be another concrete wall, it was no longer audible.

As we came up against this second wall, for the first time I observed that the roof of the tunnel seemed to be the concrete floor of a building. When one stood facing the wall the right side of the tunnel was earth and there were two or three feet of space between the floor above and the natural level of the ground. We crawled out of the tunnel to the right and wallowed forward along the concrete wall and not infrequently I was reminded that concrete does not yield when brought in sudden contact with a human head, even though the head be of wood or solid ivory, as some of my friends have seen fit to designate my pate.

Some forty feet along the wall and we came to an iron grating, the opening being about eighteen by thirty inches. Kim removed the grating and crawled through. I followed and found that we were in a long corridor. It was no more than four feet wide, but the ceiling was high. We went along this corridor cautiously for thirty or forty feet, where Kim turned and took hold of me and whispered a caution against making the least noise. Kim leading, we mounted a flight of narrow stairs which seemed to run up against the floor of the building above us.

Kim crowded up to the floor above us and listened. After a time he bent his head forward so that his shoulder pressed against

the floor above and cautiously raised up. It was evident there was a door in the floor. It yielded just a little. Kim held it there and listened. We could hear nothing. He raised a little higher and a pencil of light came through. We listened again.

I imagined I could hear voices, but they were not intelligible. Kim pushed the door a bit higher. More light came in here and there along the left side. Kim drew from a scabbard under his arm that vicious-looking knife and inserted the handle between the casing and the door and permitted the latter's weight to rest on the knife-handle. We could hear voices quite distinctly.

At first the conversation was in Chinese and I was of the opinion that one of the speakers was talking excitedly.

Kim pulled my head close and whispered in my ear:

"Hu-Li is learning that we have escaped."

I wanted to remind Kim that there is such a thing as counting eggs before they are hatched. To be cooped up in a dark basement, surrounded by concrete walls, with your enemies in full strength directly above you, is not my idea of an escape. I was rather prone to censure Kim for coming back to play with the fire which, literally, if you please, had all but burned me. Our escape, as Kim was pleased to call it, was not so complete that I felt it prudent to engage in even a whispered conversation, so I refrained from discussion of our situation, realizing that I was entirely at the mercy of Kim and that if he could not find the way out, I was lost and probably he with me.

As I have remarked the conversation first audible to us was in Chinese, but presently some one spoke in very good English and only a few words had reached my ears when I recognized the voice of Hu-Li.

"So the American has slipped away!" Hu-Li was saying in that cold, calculating voice. "Buddha will have his sport, nevertheless, and we have some one who will, I am sure, be quite willing to take the American's place."

"By that you mean?"

The question was asked in a lone, calm voice. I was leaning against Kim and with

the first word I felt a tremor in his body. For some reason my own heart quickened and I found it difficult to breathe.

"Do not pretend that you miss my meaning and that you have not had a hand in delivering this American fool," Hu-Li said. "You cannot invade my own castle and go away to laugh. It is not for such folly I am named. The American is nothing, a simple fellow whose head has been turned by the artifices of a woman. But, to have in my hands the Daughter of the White Star—surely this day's sun has smiled on Hu-Li."

"I came on your word of honor," the low, calm voice protested. "I came openly, to deal honestly. I have your oath that no harm should be done me and that I need fear no trickery. Since the money was, after all, the prize, I have offered to deliver that to you for the safety and freedom of the American gentleman—"

"Even your American fool," Hu-Li interrupted, "would agree with me that all is fair in love and war and this is—"

Kim put his shoulders against the door, eased up on it so that he could remove his knife and when the door was in place whispered in my ear:

"I am sorry. The Daughter of the White Star has come in search of you and Hu-Li is playing false. I must go to her assistance. Perhaps you could find your way—"

"I'll go where you go," I interrupted, and my voice was none too low, "providing you go up in that room and teach that pig-tailed, fish-faced, double-dealing crook that he can't talk that way to a lady and get away with it."

"It may mean a desperate fight," Kim warned me.

"I'll trounce him if it's the last act I play this side of Kingdom Come. Let's go."

"Take this knife," Kim said, offering me that vicious-looking blade.

"I need nothing but my hands for that coyote; thank you, Kim," I said. "Up with the door!"

We crowded as far up the steps as we could, our backs against the door.

"Up!" Kim exclaimed, and up we went,

pushing the door up and back and upsetting a table and vase which was standing on the door above us.

It seemed to me that we had stepped suddenly into the midst of Oriental splendor and elegance; it was indeed a strange setting for a death struggle.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ASTONISHING ENEMY.

IN moments of high excitement one's impressions are distorted and not altogether reliable. As we flung up the door the Fox, no more than twelve feet from us, started forward. Kim was first out of the cellarway and showed a most ferocious determination to close in with the Fox, but this cunning creature, when he saw Kim's knife, retreated hastily to the wall, where, at the height of a man's head, perched an eagle of ivory, with wings outstretched.

The Fox seized on the tip of one of these wings and pressed it down to the eagle's side and at once two great tapestries which, with their golden dragons, decorated the wall behind the Fox, pulled away to either side and disclosed four soldiers. Under any other circumstance they would have been mirth provoking, for they were equipped in trappings which must have been out of date when Columbus discovered America. The fact that each carried a saber which seemed to be an ancestor of the modern corn-knife, made it quite impossible for me to enjoy the comic opera tableau.

Two of the tin soldiers quickly advanced, one on either side of the Fox and, I am sure, their prompt action alone saved him from Kim's blade. I am not sure but that Kim would have undertaken to entertain the Fox and his reinforcements if the Daughter of the White Star had permitted it. When Kim was so close to the three men that another step would have brought an exchange of blows the young woman called to him:

"Kim! Not so fast! I am a guest here."

Kim stepped back and, keeping his face toward the enemy, said:

"His word is a rotten limb to break

under the weight of the first bird that trusts it."

"There are those who prefer money to blood," the woman replied, "and I have brought money for the Most Distinguished."

"As for the Purple Flower," the Fox interjected, "the enemies of the Chosen of Heaven, even when they presume to come as guests, are entitled to scant hospitality. As for these, the scum of the gutters, they came to drink blood and they shall have their fill."

The Fox's lips were drawn out in thin lines and his narrow eyes had closed to mere slits; he spoke with no warmth and with uncanny control. It was quite evident that he held himself the master of the situation, and, I was quite ready to believe, he would make the most of his opportunities.

"The Most Distinguished will remember," the woman replied, "that others have gone out to drink blood and do violence and the American came into your house bound by your servants. You attempted to steal money and the Fox was defeated by his own cunning. I have brought you the money and am willing to deliver it to you now on condition that I and these, my friends, go to the street unmolested."

"That which is within my house, already is mine," the Fox replied. "And I might also add, the bird in the net does not set the terms for freedom."

Kim stood his ground as if done in marble while the Daughter of the White Star carried on the diplomatic conversation and I, feeling certain that if we departed from the lair of the Fox, it would be only because we were more cunning than he, or better fighters than his tin soldiers, looked about the room to discover something in the way of a weapon.

A suspicion, indeed a conviction, that I was the butt of this all-too-serious jest began to take possession of me. From the conversation I gathered that the money for which I had been sent was now in the possession of the woman. Though I had no time to reflect on them, the questions which were in my mind were whether or not I had been used as a foil and, if I had been so used, had the Daughter of the White Star

known of the plan when she assigned me the task of calling Tao Tang?

An anger which I did not attempt to analyze began to take possession of me and with it came a determination to get myself out of the mess I was in without much consideration of what happened to the others involved.

The door by which Kim and I had come into the room was in the center of the large, rectangular chamber. As we came up the steps to our right was the Fox. Now standing with him were two of his guards. Two more were directly behind them and against the wall. A little to the left of the door through which we had entered—the door opening from the right to the left—stood the Daughter of the White Star. Behind her, and in front of the one entrance to the room—at any rate, the only entrance visible—stood that grinning, fat-faced messenger on whom I could place the blame for all my troubles.

When Kim and I sprang up from the stairs and I found myself in the room, I had turned to the left, toward the woman, having in mind perhaps that I would try to protect her. As I have observed, when we raised the door, a small, ornamental table which had been standing on it was overturned, and when the door fell back to the left it broke off two table-legs. These were about three feet long and about as thick as a man's wrist at the bottom, tapering to about half the size at the top. With these two war-clubs I felt as if I might be able to give a good account of myself, and I now made bold to pick up these and break off, by striking it on the floor, a side rod which was hanging to one of them. Diplomatic negotiations ended right there.

"The housebreaker will keep his profane hands off of property which does not belong to him," the Fox said when he saw what I was doing.

"Are you talking to me?" I asked.

"To you," he sneered.

"All right, old catfish!" I spat out with all the venom in my system. "Listen to a white man. I'm going out of here and I'm going right this minute. If you or your tin soldiers try to stop me you'll take the consequences."

The Fox gave an order in Chinese and the grinning, fat-faced messenger manipulated an ornament on the left wall and the door closed in the one entrance to the room. As far as I could see, if I was going to depart I would have to go as I came. I moved to the head of the stairs and, turning to the Daughter of the White Star, said:

"No woman is called upon to buy liberty for me. I invite you and Kim to go with me if you would be rid of this human vermin."

She moved toward me and held out her hands rather pathetically.

"I'm so sorry," she began, "I—"

That grinning, fat-faced messenger was moving up behind her. In another instant he would be close enough to seize her. I took hold of her arm and none too gently pulled her to the head of the stairs. The Fox said something to his animated tin cans and in the same instant Kim exclaimed:

"Down quick!" And then, in a voice which thrilled with the fanaticism and bravery of a crusader he called, "Tung Meng Hui."

"Tung Meng Hui!" replied the Daughter of the White Star, turning and starting toward Kim. I seized her and forced her down the steps, giving her such a shove

that she did not recover her balance until she was half-way to the floor below.

The Fox made no move, but his tin soldiers pressed in on Kim, who retreated slowly and warily, watching for an opportunity to dart in with that wicked blade. I had the two table-legs. The grinning, fat-faced messenger was circling the room so that he would come up in Kim's rear. I took one table-leg in my right hand and threw it with all my might and had the great satisfaction of seeing it take one of the tin soldiers across the face, dropping him to the floor before his lord and master, the Fox.

This little side show diverted attention long enough so that Kim darted in on another animated sardine-case and drove his knife into the guard's shoulder.

I was now at the head of the stairs with Kim but a step away and the grinning, fat-faced messenger, crouching as if ready to spring at him, four or five feet away. The two soldiers who had been back against the wall were rushing in to aid the messenger.

A soldier came up on either side of him as he crouched like a gorilla on his toes and hands. I knew he was going to spring at Kim and also I knew that if Kim's blade didn't get him I was going to comb his hair with a table-leg—providing the two guards with the corn-knives didn't get too close.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

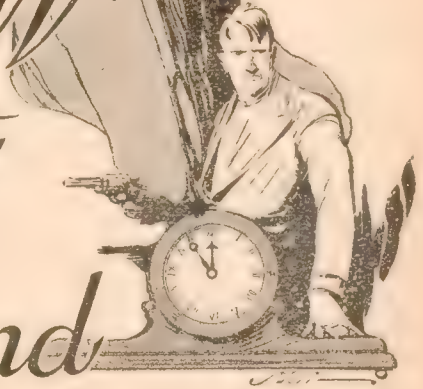
IN THE LIBRARY.

HERE, through half-open windows, one descries
 Long sweeps of green, a leafy grove made dim
 By countless birds, while in the space within
 Merge quiet tones which quaintly harmonize.
 Those who seek solace in the printed page
 May find within these umber-tinted walls,
 Where peace, like manna in the desert falls,
 Row upon row of volumes dull with age.
 Here Youth greets Eld—the constant ebb and flow
 Of footsteps mingle in this tranquil place,
 Light tripping steps, with more sedate and slow,
 Fall gently on the flags and leave no trace.
 Above some dainty volume rendered gay
 With gaudy script, hushed childish voices blend,
 While ancient tomes are fondled day by day
 By old and tired fingers—near the end.

Clare MacDermott.

The Man Who Did Not Understand

by Ray Cummings



HE had decided to kill himself. He would do it at midnight—this day which was now closing would be his last. He sat alone in his lavish little study, staring at the clock on the mantel. Still an hour left! Sixty minutes more of the strife and turmoil of life—then eternal rest and peace.

The minutes slipped slowly by. He sat stretched at full length in the Morris chair, with a tiny revolver in his hand, musing on what lay behind him. It had been a long struggle—but now it was almost over, and he was glad. Anne—dear little wife that she was—would never know what a failure he had been. He had planned things well.

The sound of a midnight struggle—disordered room—the breaking of a window glass—a cry of terror—and then the revolver shot! A moment was all it would take. They would find him lying on the floor beside his littered desk. Anne would miss the money she thought he had placed there. They would call it robbery and murder. He smiled—a haggard, mirthless smile—and pressed his hands against his throbbing temples.

A fit of coughing seized him. He must have closed his eyes; or perhaps for an instant he fainted. When he again looked

up, a man was standing quietly in the doorway—a slender man with a pointed, brown beard, and large, gentle eyes that regarded him compassionately. There was something compelling in the gaze of those eyes—something that made him forget to be surprised.

"What is your name?" asked the Stranger gently.

"Blaine," he answered. He wondered vaguely at his submission to this stronger will. Yet he was neither angered nor afraid—only dully curious.

The Stranger dropped his hand from the portière against which he was leaning and came slowly forward.

"You had better put that away—for a time," he said in a quiet manner, and he pointed to the revolver that lay forgotten on Blaine's lap. "You do not need it—just now."

Blaine slipped the weapon into the side pocket of his coat. His glance fell on the white clock face. True. He did not need it yet. There were still forty-five minutes before midnight.

The Stranger seemed to answer his thoughts.

"Three-quarters of an hour is a long time," he said. "Long enough for what I have to show you." He smiled reassuring-

ly. "Will you go with me? There are some things I want you to see?"

Blaine stood up.

"Yes," he said meekly, "if you will bring me back by midnight."

"I will bring you back," said the Stranger. "Of course, I know what it is you have planned—I would not thwart you—even if I could."

It was raining when they reached the street—a raw, chilling rain, and a wind that seemed to choke Blaine in his throat and made his cough much worse.

He shivered as they hurried forward.

II.

BLAINE could see the whole room quite clearly from where they stood in the shadows. It was a dingy little attic with a side skylight—lighted now by a small oil-lamp—a bedroom, kitchen, and workshop all in one. An easel stood in one corner with a partly finished canvas upon it. A little child lay in a baby-carriage asleep. Two others, older, lay huddled on a mattress on the floor against the wall. A thin, drawn, white-faced little woman moved about the stove; she was ironing on a board that lay across two chairs.

It was the man on whom Blaine's interest chiefly centered. He was in his shirt-sleeves, sitting beside a rough board table on which the lamp stood—a man with a delicate, sensitive face, emaciated by illness, with iron-gray hair that should have been black. He was working at a little drawing—with his left hand. His right lay idle in his lap—and Blaine noticed then that his whole attitude as he sat hunched in his chair was twisted and unnatural.

"You must stop now, dear," said the woman in a thin, tired voice. "You must get some sleep, or you won't be able to start again in the morning."

Blaine turned questioningly to his companion.

"Three years ago he was a successful artist," the Stranger whispered. "Fame and wealth were almost in his grasp. He was paralyzed—his whole right side. There is his last painting—unfinished." The Stranger pointed to the easel. "He

was stricken without warning. The art around which he had built his life was taken from him. Now he has come to this."

Blaine pondered. "What is he doing?"

"Making place-cards and other miserable little drawings that he has learned to do with his left hand, to sell in art shops. He—keeps going, as you see, but that is all."

The Stranger's big, gentle eyes met Blaine's.

"Is there—no hope?" Blaine asked. "Will he never recover the use of his other hand?"

"Never. He knows that. Another stroke—it will come surely, though he does not know when. Then he will be worse—not better."

"And he goes on working—like that?" Blaine's voice unconsciously rose above a whisper; but no one except the Stranger seemed to hear him.

"He goes on working—of course. What else is there to do? But can you understand how he must feel—sitting there helpless? That picture—there on the easel—that shows what he used to be—what the Creator, for some purpose of His own, saw fit to take from him."

Blaine was silent. It was cold where he was standing; a fit of coughing seized him.

"Your cough is very bad," said the Stranger. He laid his hand sympathetically on Blaine's arm. "Consumption, perhaps?"

"Good Heaven, no!" ejaculated Blaine in horror. "A bronchial cold. I caught it a few weeks ago. I'm all run down—nervous and worried. Not about my health particularly—about my business. I—the doctor said I'd be all right in another month if I could take care of myself."

The Stranger smiled. "You are very fortunate."

Before Blaine could answer, his attention was again brought to the room. The man at the table suddenly let his head drop to his hands.

"I'm too tired, Grace—too tired." His tone was almost a moan as the woman ran to him. "Too tired—now—to work any more."

The Stranger plucked at Blaine's sleeve.

"Let us go. There is nothing more to see here. They'll go on—like that, or worse—until the end. Let us go."

"Yes," said Blaine, shivering. "Let us go."

III.

It seemed colder in the street than before. The wind had freshened; the rain had turned to snow, huge white flakes that slanted down and already lay thick upon the ground. Blaine pulled his big overcoat collar over his ears as they came out, and put on his fur-lined gloves.

"You are warmly dressed," said the Stranger. "That is good."

They hastened forward—Blaine pondering what he had seen; the Stranger stalking silently by his side, guiding him through the nearly deserted streets.

They reached an open space—a little city park where a line of shivering men wound its way up to the window of an impromptu wooden shack. Blaine knew what it was at once, though he did not remember actually having seen it before. The "bread line" it was popularly termed—where bread and coffee were dispensed to the human dregs of the city at a nominal charge.

Half a hundred men were in the line—rag ends of humanity, shuffling slowly forward, some talking and laughing with defiant laughter, others silent with the numb hopelessness of despair—all aimless save for this one immediate aim of obtaining food.

"Poor devils!" said Blaine. "That's as low as one can get, isn't it?"

As though to answer him, a man pulled timidly at his coat from behind. Blaine turned to look into eyes that burned deep-set in their sockets, a livid, dead skin drawn like parchment over high cheek-bones—and a mouth below that twitched hideously even while its lips tried to smile. Blaine could hardly hear the whining, pleading words that came from the mouth.

The Stranger leaned toward him. "The bread and coffee costs two cents," he said. "He hasn't got it—he wants you to give it to him so he can get in line."

"God!" muttered Blaine. He pulled a

coin from his pocket—it chanced to be a quarter—and put it in the trembling, jerking fingers that came up out of their rags to clutch it.

Invoking thanks from Heaven upon his benefactor, the beggar shuffled away, passed the end of the line unheeding, and disappeared.

"He didn't want bread and coffee," said the Stranger. "A drug fiend—you have sent him back for more. It is well you did, perhaps, for he might have died through lack of it."

One man in the line passed a joke of coarse vulgarity; a dozen within hearing laughed loudly.

"You see," said the Stranger, "these you were pitying so a moment ago are not as bad off as that other. It is difficult to judge the degree of one's misfortune when everything is so truly a matter of comparison."

Blaine shuddered as the Stranger again pulled him forward.

IV.

A SPACIOUS living-room with the luster of wealth upon it met Blaine's curious eyes. A man came in, threw his hat and coat on a chair, and sat down before a small mahogany desk—a handsome, dominating figure, clad in evening clothes. He began to write briskly.

The Stranger whispered to Blaine:

"Here is a man who has won success. You would say so to look at him, wouldn't you?"

Blaine nodded.

"If I told you his name, you would recognize him as a man worth many millions," the Stranger went on. "He was rich yesterday. And to-day it has all been swept away. One of those cataclysms of finance has made him a pauper. Worse than that—a man so saddled with debt it will take him years to work it off. You would hardly believe that to look at him, would you?"

"No," said Blaine. "Does he know of it?"

"Oh, yes, he knows of it. To-morrow holds nothing for him but humiliation and

disgrace. You will read of it in the papers in the morning. That's what he is writing now—making a list of the things he must do to-morrow. He bears it well, doesn't he? The real reason is because he has the courage to do the right thing. But he does not know that. He thinks there is another reason."

"What?" Blaine asked. He pulled himself back a little in the alcove in which they were standing.

"He loves his wife," said the Stranger. "And he thinks she loves him. He is facing it all—with her—and he is not afraid." The Stranger laughed—not cynically, but sorrowfully. "There is a note over there on the table. He did not see it when he came in—but he will in a moment."

Blaine held his breath, trying not to cough. After a time the man at the desk rose impulsively to his feet. A black leather case he had brought in with him lay near by. He turned to get it, and his glance fell upon the white rectangle lying under the electrolier on the center-table. He picked the envelope up and opened it abstractedly.

Then, as he read the few lines it contained, Blaine saw his figure suddenly stiffen. His face drained of blood and he swayed as though about to fall. The fingers holding the letter crumpled it convulsively into a ball and it fell to the floor unheeded.

"The wife he loves has left him," said the Stranger in a whisper, "as rats leave a sinking ship. She does not love him. She has never loved him—and he knows it now."

The man at the table jerked its drawer open. Blaine saw the gleam of metal in his hand. He turned away, but the Stranger's grip on his shoulder forced him back.

The revolver was almost at the man's temple now as he stood there white and trembling. An instant later, before the shot Blaine's horror had anticipated could come, a quivering child-cry sounded through the silent house.

The man at the table paused. His arm fell to his side. His contorted face relaxed.

The cry was repeated. A childish treble called:

"Mother! Daddy! I want my mother. Oh, daddy—are you out there?"

The revolver dropped to the man's feet. He turned swiftly and hurried from the room toward the child who had called him.

The Stranger laughed again. "He could not do it, you see—because he is not a coward. He must go on now and face things alone—poorer indeed than he ever dreamed, for besides his money, position, power, even honor, he has lost the dearest thing he held in life—the love of his wife."

The Stranger paused, then went on earnestly:

"Do you think that was a coincidence—the cry of that child that saved him? Not so. Suicide is a crime against God. He will not allow it to be done on impulse—unthinking. To every one planning self-destruction, no matter how impulsively, there comes, at the eleventh hour, a great understanding. It may be heeded—it may not. But it comes—for that is God's way."

Blaine was trembling violently.

"You are unnerved," said the Stranger gently. "You can appreciate the suffering this man is undergoing, for you too are married, aren't you?"

"Yes," answered Blaine. "I'm all on edge. I—"

"You are thinking how *you* would feel if your wife should—"

"No! No!" A sudden strength came into Blaine's voice. "It isn't that. I—it isn't that! I'm sure of Anne. She loves me—God knows I'm sure of that."

"She would follow you anywhere," said the Stranger. "You *are* sure of that, aren't you? No matter what happened to you—what trouble, what disgrace came—she would stand firmly at your side. I know that—and so do you. You are very fortunate—very fortunate indeed—to be so blessed."

Blaine turned to him piteously. "Can't we go now? I want to go home. I—I'm all on edge. I want to—to think it out quietly."

The Stranger's arm about him tightened with compassion.

"We will go at once—of course," he said very quietly and simply.

V.

BLAINE came to the sudden knowledge that he had been watching the clock hands steadily. One minute of twelve! He had not realized it was so late. The time had come! He gripped the revolver in his hand and told himself he must go through with it. Trembling and cold he stood up, trying to separate in his tired brain the real from the fancied.

A calm, gentle voice seemed ringing in his ears. He heard the words again as plainly as though some one were speaking them aloud.

"God will not allow suicide to be done on impulse—unthinking. And so always there comes at the eleventh hour a great understanding. It may be heeded—it may not. But it comes, for that is God's way."

The little clock began striking its twelve musical strokes. Blaine raised his hand uncertainly; and then, turning, flung the revolver with a crash through the window pane.

A woman appeared in the doorway of the study a moment later—a dainty little golden-haired woman in negligée and slippers. Alarm was on her face, though her eyes were still heavy with sleep. Blaine was sitting on a couch, his head in his hands. Behind him gaped a jagged hole in the glass of the window.

The woman hurried forward. "What is the matter, Will? I heard a noise—it woke me up."

He sprang to his feet, and pulled her down beside him on the couch, holding her close as though he feared something would take her from him.

"I—nothing, Anne. I was half asleep

too. I guess I got frightened. I threw—something through the window."

She gazed at him tenderly, her eyes wide with wonderment, as he went on hurriedly:

"Anne, I never understood things as I do now. I've been worried, depressed, nervous—you know that. But there are other things you don't know. We've got a great fight before us, little woman—a big, terrible, losing fight." He stopped in a paroxysm of coughing.

She held him closer, alarm whitening her cheeks. "Not—your health, Will?"

He recovered his breath. "Not my health, of course not. I'm all right. My business, Anne. I've never told you much about that."

"Oh!" She sighed with unutterable relief. "Not to-night, dear. Don't let's talk about it to-night."

He held her at arm's length, staring into her eyes. "No, I won't go into it to-night. To-morrow—I'll tell you. And you'll face it with me?"

She parted her lips to answer, but he stopped her.

"No, no! I don't mean to ask you that. That's degrading. I know you'll stand with me, firm as a rock, no matter what comes. I know it—I've always known it. I haven't that as an excuse—though it wouldn't be one anyway. I haven't any excuse—nothing. Not a single—solitary—thing!"

He broke into half-hysterical sobs, with another violent fit of coughing.

She held him close in her arms. "Will! You mustn't talk that way! You're hysterical. Come to bed, dear. You'll feel better in the morning. Then we'll fix it together—whatever it is."

And with her arms about him, soothing him as though he were a little child, she led him away.



THE POWER OF THE PEN

ARCHIBALD wrote novels, Edgar built the lofty rime,
And Philip fashioned plays with "punch" and vim,
But Bert could write his check at any time,
So what could Ethel do but marry him!

Morris Abel Beer.

The Blind Spot

by Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint

A "DIFFERENT" SERIAL

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE PERFECT IMPOSTOR.

CHICK gasped. Of all that assemblage—Rhamdas, guards, the occupants of the two thrones—he himself was the most astounded. Was the great professor in actual fact the true Jarados? If not, how explain this miracle? But if he were, how to explain the duality, the identity? Surely, it could not be sheer chance!

Fortunately for Chick, it was dark. All eyes were fixed upon the trim figure which occupied the space of the clover-leaf on the rear wall. Except for Chick's strangled gasp, there was only the hushed silence of reverence, deep and impressive.

Then, another dot appeared. From its position, Watson took it to come from another leaf of the clover; another light approaching out of the void and cutting through the blackness exactly as the first had come. It grew and spread until it had filled the whole leaf; then, again the bursting of the flare, the diminishing of the light, and its disappearance in a thin rim at the edge. And this time there was revealed—

A handsome, brown-haired *dog*.

Watson, of course, could not understand. The silence held; he could feel the Rhamda Geos at his side, and hear him murmur something which, in itself, was quite unintelligible:

"The four-footed one! The call to humility, sacrifice, and unselfishness! The four-footed one!"

That was all. It was a shaggy shepherd dog, with a pointed nose and one ear cocked up and the other down, very wisely inquisitive. Chick had seen similar dogs many times, but he could not account for this one; certainly not in such a place. What had it to do with the Jarados?

Still the darkness. It gave him a chance to think. He wondered, rapidly, how he could link up such a creature with his description of the Jarados. What could be the purpose of a canine in occult philosophy? Or, was the whole thing, after all, mere blundering chance?

That is what bothered Chick. He did not know how to adjust himself; life, place, sequence, all were out of order. Until he could gather exact data, he must trust to intuition as before.

The two pictures vanished simultaneously. Down came the black waves from the windows, gradually, and in a moment the room was once more flooded with that mellow radiance.

The Rhamda Geos stepped forward as a murmur of awed approval arose from the assembly. There was no applause. One does not applaud the miraculous. The Geos took his hand.

"It is proven!" he declared. Then, to the Rhamdas: "Is there any question, my brothers?"

But no word came from the floor. Seemingly superstition had triumphed over all else. The men of learning turned none but reverent faces toward Watson.

He forbore to glance at the Bar Senes-

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for May 14.

tro. Despite the triumph he was apprehensive of the prince's keen genius. An agnostic is seldom converted by what could be explained away as mere coincidence. Moreover, as it ultimately appeared, the Bar now had more than one reason for antagonizing the man who claimed to be the professor's prospective son-in-law.

"Is there any question?" repeated Rhamda Geos.

But to the surprise of Chick, it came from the little queen. She was standing before her throne now, in all her maidenly daintiness. Around her waist a girdle of satin revealed the tender frailty of her figure. She gave Watson a close scrutiny, and then addressed Geos:

"I want to put one question, Rhamda. The stranger seems to be a goodly young man. He has come from the Jarados. Tell me, is he truly of the chosen?"

But a clear, derisive laugh from the opposite throne interrupted the answer. The Bar stood up, his black eyes dancing with mocking laughter.

"The chosen, O Aradna? The chosen? Do not allow yourself to be tricked by a little thing! I myself have been chosen by the inherited law of the Thomahlia!" Then to Chick: "I see, Sir Fantom, that our futures are to be intertwined with interest!"

"I don't know what you mean."

"No? Very good; if you are really come out of superstition, then I shall teach you the value of materiality. You are well made and handsome, likewise courageous. May the time soon come when you can put your mettle to the test in a fair conflict!"

"It is your own saying, O Senestro!" warned Geos. "You must abide by my lord's reply."

"True; and I shall abide. I know nothing of black magic, nor any other. But I care not. I know only that I cannot accept this stranger as a spirit. I have felt his muscles, and I know his strength; they are a man's, and a Thomahlian's."

"Then you do not abide?"

"Yes, I do. That is, I do not claim him. He has won his freedom. But as for endorsing him—no, not until he has given further proof. Let him come to the Spot of

Life. Let him take the ordeal. Let him qualify on the Day of the Prophet."

"My lord, do you accept?"

Watson had no idea what the "ordeal" might be, nor what might be the significance of the "day." But he could not very well refuse. He spoke as lightly as he could.

"Of course. I accept anything." Then, addressing the prince: "One word, O Senestro."

"Speak up, Sir Fantom!"

Watson smiled despite himself. Surely the Bar was a real skeptic. Subconsciously Chick realized that, were their positions reversed, he would likely speak as had the prince. But he was where and what he was. And the question he had in mind did not permit of good humor; it had to be said in an aggressive spirit, if not in an aggressive voice.

"Bar Senestro—what have you done with the Jarados?"

An instant's stunned silence greeted this stab. It was broken by the prince.

"The Jarados!" His voice was unruffled. "What know I of the Jarados?"

"Take care! You have seen him—you know his power!"

"You have a courageous sort of impertinence!"

"I have determination and knowledge! Bar Senestro, I have come for the Jarados!" Chick paused for effect. "Now what think you? Am I of the chosen?"

He had meant it as a deliberate taunt, and so it was taken. The Bar shot to his feet. Not that he was angered; his straight, handsome form was kingly, and for all his impulsiveness there was a certain real majesty about his every pose.

"You *are* of the chosen. It is well; you have given spice to the taunt! I would not have it otherwise. Forget not your courage on the Day of the Prophet!"

With that he stepped gracefully, superbly from the dais beneath his throne. He bowed to the Aradna, to Geos, to Chick and the assembly—and was gone. The blue guard followed in silence.

The rest of the ordeal was soon done. Nothing more was said about the Jarados, nor of what the Bar Senestro had brought

up. There were a few questions about the world he had quit, questions which put no strain upon his imagination to answer. He was out of the deep water for the present.

When the assembly dissolved Chick was conducted back to the apartments upstairs. Not to his old room, however, but to an adjoining suite, a magnificent place that would have done honor to a prince.

But Chick scarcely noted the beauty of the place—its elaborate artistry of wall hangings, its enigmatic paintings and sculptures of diminutive creatures and of strong men in the nude, its amazingly fine artificial flowers, and the deep-napped carpet on the floor. His attention flew at once to something for which he had longed—an immense globe, exactly like those used in school-rooms as representations of the earth, only very much larger.

Chick spun it around eagerly upon its axis. The first thing that he looked for was San Francisco—or, rather, North America, so that he could locate the familiar indentation of the Golden Gate. If he was on the earth he wanted to know it! Surely the oceans and continents would not change.

But he was doomed to disappointment. There was not a familiar detail. Outside of a network of curved lines indicating latitude and longitude, and the accustomed tilt of the polar axis, the globe was totally strange! So strange that Chick could not decide which was water and which was land.*

After a bit of puzzling Chick ran across a yellow patch marked with some strange characters which, upon examination, were translated in some unknown manner within his subconscious mind, to "D'Hartia." Another was lettered "Kospia."

Assuming that these were land—and there were a few others, smaller ones, of the same shade—then the land area covered approximately three-fifths of the globe. In-

ferentially the greenish remainder, or two-fifths, was the water or ocean covered area. Such a proportion was nearly the precise reverse of that obtaining on the earth. Chick puzzled over other strange names—H'Alara, Mal Somnal, Bloudou San, and the like. Not one name or outline that he could place!

How could he make his mystery fit with the words of Dr. Holcomb, and with what philosophy he knew? Somehow there was too much life, too much reality, to fit in with any spiritistic hypothesis. He was surrounded by real matter, atomic, molecular, cellular. He was certain that if he were put to it he could prove right here every law from those put forth by Newton down to the very latest discoveries.

It was still the material universe; that was certain. Therefore it was equally certain that the doctor had made a most prodigious discovery. But—what was it? What was the law that had fallen out of the Blind Spot?

He gave it up, and stepped to one of the suite's numerous windows. They were all provided with clear glass. Now was his opportunity for an uninterrupted, leisurely survey of the world about him.

As before, he noted the maze of splendid, dazzling opalescence, all the colors of the spectrum blending, weaving, vibrant, like a vast plain of smooth, Gargantuan jewels. As soon as the first blinding splendor had worn off he noted individualities in that chromatic sea, stationary billows, as it were.

Then, he made out innumerable round domes, spread out in rows and in curves, without seeming order or system; *buildings*, every roof a perfect gleaming dome, its surface fairly alive with the reflected light of that amazing sun. Of such was the landscape made.

As before he could hear the incessant undertone of vague music, of rhythmical,

* NOTE—As to the possibility that Chick had in some manner become transferred to another planet, through the operation of some undiscovered law of affinity, General Hume offers this: A planet has often been vaguely observed in an orbit lying between that of Mercury and the sun. "Vulcan" is the name of this dubious member of our solar system. Now, granting that such a globe could exist and still be undetected, due to its proximity to the sun's brilliance, then the "Thomahlia" becomes explicable at once. The great size of the sun, as seen by Chick, also the curious nature of the atmosphere (which would have to be very dense, if it were to reflect the sun's rays enough to permit life), both fit in with this hypothesis.

shimmering, whispering sound, it was like the music that runs through dreams. And the whole air was laden with the hint of sweet scents; diapasmic, tinnient, and tinged with the perfume of attar and myrrh—of a most delicate ambrosia.

He opened the window.

For a moment he stood still, the air bathing his face, the unknown fragrance filling his nostrils. The whole world seemed thrumming with that hitherto faint quiver of sound. Now it was resonant and strong, though still only an undertone. He looked below him; as he did so, something dropped from the side of the window opening—a long, delicate tendril, sinuous and alive. It touched his face, and then— It drooped, drooped like a wounded thing. He reached out his hand and plucked it, wondering. And he found, at its tip, a floating crimson blossom as delicate as the frailest cobweb, so inconceivably dainty that it wilted and crumbled at the slightest touch.

Chick thrust his head out of the window. The whole building, from ground to dome, was covered—waving, moving, tenuous, a maze of incomprehensibly delicate color—orchids!

He had never dreamed of anything so beautiful, or so daintily splendid. He was acquainted with flowers, and knew many of the species; but—none like these. Everywhere, these orchids; to give them the name nearest to the unknown one. As far as he could see, living beauty!

And then, with his senses half dulled with what they were experiencing, he noticed something stranger still.

From the petals and foliage about him, little clouds of color wafted up, like mists of perfume, forever rising and intermittently settling. It was mysteriously harmonious, continuous—like life itself. Chick looked closer, and listened. And then he knew.

These mists were clouds—fogs—of tiny, multicolored insects.

Watson was more than bewildered. It was all absolutely new. Everything that he had seen was exotic, wafted through sense to the degree of elysium. Nothing was as it should be.

He looked down farther, into the streets.

They were teeming with life, with motion. He was in a city whose size made it a true metropolis. All the buildings were large, and, although of unfamiliar architecture, undeniably of a refined, advanced art. Without exception, their roofs were domed. Hence the effect of a sea of bubbles.

Directly below, straight down from his window, was a very broad street. From it at varying angles ran a number of intersecting avenues. The height of his window was great—he looked very closely, and made out two lines of color lining and outlining the street surrounding the apartments. On the one side the line was blue, on the other crimson; they were guards. And where the various avenues intersected cables must have been stretched; for these streets were packed and jammed with a surging multitude, which the guards seemed engaged in holding back. As far up the avenues as Chick could see, the seething mass of fellow creatures extended, a gently pulsing, varicolored potential commotion. Chick wondered what it was all about.

As he looked, one of the packed streets broke into confusion. He could see the guards wheeling and running into formation; from behind, other platoons rushed up reinforcements. The great crowd was rolling forward, breaking on the edge of the spear-armed guards like the surf of a rolling sea.

Chick had a sudden thought. Were they not looking up at his window? He could glimpse arms uplifted and hands pointed. Even the guards, those held in reserve, looked up. Then—such was the distance—the rumble of the mob reached his ears; at the same time, spreading like a grass fire, the commotion-broke out in another street, to another and another, until the air was filled with the new undertone of countless human tongues.

Chick was fascinated. The thing was over-strange. While he looked and listened the whole scene turned to conflict; the voice of the throng became ominous. The guards still held the cables, still beat back the populace. Could they hold out? wondered Chick idly; and, what was it all about?

Something touched his shoulder. He wheeled. One of the tall, red-uniformed

guards was standing beside him. Watson instinctively drew back, and as he did so the other stepped forward, touched the snap, and closed the window.

"What's the idea? I was just getting interested!"

The soldier nodded pleasantly, respectfully—reverently.

"Orders from below, my lord. Were you to remain at that window it would take all the guards in the Mahovisal to keep back the Thomahlians."

"Why?" Chick was astonished.

"There are a million pilgrims in the city, my lord, who have waited months upon months for just one glimpse of you."

Watson considered. This was a new and a dazing aspect of the affair. Evidently the expression on his face told the soldier that some explanation would not be amiss.

"The pilgrims are almost innumerable, my lord. They are all of the one great faith. They are, my lord, the true believers, the believers in the Day."

The Day! Instantly Watson recalled Senestro's use of the expression. What did it mean? What was its bearing upon the enigma of the Jarados, and what was its relation to Watson's own predicament?

He sensed a valuable clue. He caught and held the soldier's eye.

"Tell me," commanded Chick. "What is this Day of which you speak?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN ALLY, AND SOLID GROUND.

THE soldier replied unhesitatingly:

"It is the Day of Life, my lord.

Others call it the 'first of the Sixteen Days.' Still others, simply the Day of the Prophet, or Jarados."

"When will it be?"

"Soon. It is but two days hence. And with the going down of the sun on that day the Fulfilment is to begin, and the Life is to come. Hence the crowd below, my lord; yet they are nothing compared with the throngs that to-day are pressing their way from all D'Hartia and Kospia toward the Mahovisal."

"All because of this Day?"

"And to see you, my lord."

"All believers in the Jarados?"

"All, truly; but they do not all believe in your lordship. There are many sects, including the Bars, that consider you an impostor; but the rest—perhaps the most—believe you the Herald of the Day. All want to see you, for whatever motive."

"These Bars: who are they?"

"The military priesthood, my lord. As priests they teach a literal interpretation of the prophecy; as soldiers they maintain their own aggrandizement. To be more specific, my lord, it is they who accuse you of being one of the false ones."

"Why?"

"Because it is written in the prophecy, my lord, that we may expect impostors, and that we are to slay them."

"Then this coming contest with the Senestro—" beginning to sense the drift of things.

"Yes, my lord; it will be a physical contest, in which the best man destroys the other!"

The guard was a tall, finely made and truly handsome chap of perhaps thirty-five. Watson liked the clear blue of his eyes and the openness of his manner. At the same time he felt that he was being weighed and balanced.

"My lord is not afraid?"

"Not at all! I was just thinking—when does this kill take place?"

"Two days hence, my lord; on the first of the Sixteen Sacred Days."

And thus Chick found a stanch friend. The soldier's name, he learned, was "the Jan Lucar." He was supreme in command of the royal guards; and Chick soon came to feel that the man would as cheerfully lay down his life for him, Watson, as for the little queen herself. All told, Chick was able to store away in his memory a few very important facts:

First, that the Aradna did not like the Senestro.

Second, that the Jan Lucar hated the great Bar because of the prince's ambition to wed the little queen and her cousin, the Nervina; also because of his selfish, autocratic ways.

Next, that were the Nervina on hand she

would thwart the Senestro; for she was a very learned woman, as advanced as Rhamda Avec himself. But that she was a queen first and a scholar afterward; her motive in going through the Blind Spot was to take care of the political welfare of her people; her purposes were as high as the Rhamda Avec's, but partook of statesmanship rather than spirituality.*

Finally, that the Rhamdas were perfectly willing for the coming contest to take place, on the evening of the Day of the Prophet, in the Temple of the Bell and Leaf.

"Jan Lucar," Watson felt prompted to say, "you need have no fear as to the outcome of this ordeal, whatever it may be. With your faith in me, I cannot fail. For the present, I need books, papers, scientific data. Moreover, I want to see the outside of this building."

The guardsman bowed. "The data is possible, my lord, but as to leaving the building—I must consult the queen and the Rhamda Geos first."

"But I said *must*," Watson dared to say. "I must go out into your world, see your cities, your lands, rivers, mountains, before I do aught else. I must be sure!"

The other bowed again. He was visibly impressed.

"What you ask, my lord, is full of danger. You must not be seen in the streets—yet. There are followers of the Bar Senestro who, if they found you, would tear you to bits. Untold bloodshed would ensue inevitably. To half the Thomahlia you are sacred, and to the other half an impostor. I repeat, my lord, that I must see the Geos and the queen."

Another bow and the Jan disappeared.

Chick stood back where, without being seen, he yet could watch through the window the spectacle below. The crowds had settled again into inertia, slowly surging and quiet, like a quiescent geyser that want-

ed only the tossing of a stone to send it into a boiling rage. What if they learned the truth about him?

In a few moments the Jan Lucar returned with the Geos.

"The Jan has told me, my lord, that you would go out."

"If possible. I want to see your world."

"I think it can be arranged. Is your lordship ready to go?"

"Presently." Watson laid a hand on the big globe he had already puzzled over. "This represents the Thomahlia?"

"Yes, my lord." And then, as Watson put no further question, the Geos eagerly asked: "Tell us, my lord, is the next world above our heads or under our feet? Or is it both? We have nothing but conjecture, and our curiosity is as great as it is natural. From the great mediums† we gained the impression, as a rule, that the occult world was an ethereal one, impossible to describe, floating in space and composed of drifting souls. But sometimes there were messages saying that it is a world much like our own, with rivers, mountains, life—reality. The great Avec held to that view, and worked on that basis; now, you have come, my lord, to confirm his theory. It is the wisdom of the Jarados!"

Watson thought best to keep away from that topic, and stick to the globe.

"How long is your day, Geos?"

"Twenty-four hours."

"I mean, how many revolutions in one circuit of the sun, in one year-circle?"

As he uttered the question Chick held his breath. It had suddenly struck him that he had touched an extremely definite point. The answer might *place* him!

"You mean, my lord, how long is a circle in terms of days?"

"Yes!"

"Three hundred and sixty-five and a fraction, my lord."

* NOTE—As far as Chick Watson was able to make out in the brief time at his disposal, the government of the Thomahlian world was like its philosophy—unified; and it displayed a puzzling resemblance on the one side to the caste system of aristocracy, while on the other it was highly socialistic. How these two elements were reconciled, all under the constitutional form of an apparently free republic, remains for future investigations to reveal.

† NOTE—These mediums were individuals gathered from a certain savage tribe of near aborigines, for some unaccountable reason unaltered by the Thomahlian civilization. "If they were Indians," comments Mme. Le Fabre, "then we have an explanation of what we call 'controls,' many of whom are known to our mediums as redmen."

Watson was dumfounded. Could there be, in all the universe, another world with precisely the same revolution period? But he could not afford to show his concern. He said:

"Tell me, have you a moon?"

"Yes; it has a cycle of about twenty-eight days."

Watson drew a deep breath. Inconceivable though it appeared, he was still on his own earth. For a moment he pondered, wondering if he had been caught up in a tangle of time-displacement.* Could it be that, instead of living in the present, he had somehow become entangled in the past or the future?

If so—and by now he was so accustomed to the unusual that he considered this staggering possibility with equanimity—if the time coefficient was at fault, then how to account for the picture of the professor, in that leaf? Had they both been the victims of a ghastly cosmic joke?

There was but one way to find out.

"Come! Lead the way, Geos; let us take a look at your world!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LOOKING DOWN.

PRESENTLY the three men were standing at the door of a vast room, one entire side of which was wide open to the outer air. It was half filled by a number of queer, shining objects. At first glance Chick took them to be immense beetles.

The Jan Lucar spoke to the Geos:

"We had best take the June Bug of the Rhamda Avec."

Watson thought it wise to say nothing, show nothing. The Jan ran up to one of the glistening affairs, and without the slightest noise he spun it gracefully around, running it out into the center of the mosaic floor.

"I presume," apologized the Geos, "that you have much finer aircraft in your world."

Aircraft! Watson was all eagerness. He saw that the June Bug was about ten feet high, with a bunched, buglike body. On closer scrutiny he could make out the outlines of wings folded tight against the sides. As for the material, it must have been metal, to use a term which does not explain very much, after all. In every respect the machine was a duplicate of some great insect, except that instead of legs it had well-braced rollers.

"How does it operate?" Watson wanted to know. "That is, what power do you use, and how do you apply it?"

The Jan Lucar threw back a plate. Watson looked inside, and saw a mass of fine, spider-web threads, softer than the tips of rabbit's hair, all radiating from a central gray object about the size of a pea. Chick reached out to touch this thing with his finger.

But the Geos, like a flash, caught him by the shoulder and pulled him back.

"Pardon me, my lord!" he exclaimed. "But you must not touch it! You—even you, would be annihilated!" Then to the Lucar: "Very well."

Whereupon the other did something in the front of the craft; touched a lever, perhaps. Instantly the gray, spidery hairs turned to a dull red.

"Now you may touch it," said the Geos.

But Chick's desire had vanished. Instead he ventured a question:

"All very interesting, but—where is your machinery?"

The Rhamda was slightly amused. He smiled a little. "You must give us a little credit, my lord. We may seem backward to you, but we have passed beyond reliance upon simple machines. That little gray pellet is, of course, our motive force; it is a highly refined mineral†, which we mine in vast quantity. It has been in use for centuries. As for the hairlike web, that is our idea of a transmission."

Watson hoped that he did not look as uncomprehending as he felt. The other continued:

*NOTE—Referring to a theosophical theorem which, in the light of what followed, need not be mentioned here.

†NOTE—Professor Herold is certain that radioactivity of some kind is indicated here.

"In aerial locomotion we are content to imitate life as much as possible. We long ago discarded engines and propellers, and instead tried to duplicate the muscular and nervous systems of the birds and insects. We fly exactly as they do; our motive force is intrinsic. In some respects, we have improved upon life."

"But it is still only a machine, Geos."

"To be sure, my lord; only a machine. Anything without the life principle must remain so."

The Jan Lucar pressed another catch, allowing another plate to lower and thereby disclose a glazed door, which opened into a cozy apartment fitted with wicker chairs, and large enough for four persons. There was some sort of control gear, which the Jan Lucar explained was not connected directly with the flying and steering members, but indirectly through the membranes of the weblike system. It was uncannily similar to the nervous connections of the cerebellum with the various parts of the anatomy of an insect.

"Does it travel very fast?"

"We think so, my lord. This one, which is known as the June Bug, is the private machine of the Rhamda Avec. It is rather small, but the swiftest machine in the Thomahlia."

They entered the compartment. Watson took his seat beside the Geos, while the soldier sat forward next to the control elements. He laid his hands on certain levers; next instant, the machine was gliding noiselessly over the mosaic, on to a short incline and thence, with ever increasing speed, toward and through the open side of the room.

The slides had all been thrown back; the compartment was enclosed only in glass. Watson could get a clear view; and he was amazed at the speed of the craft. Before Chick could think they were out in mid air and ascending skyward with the speed of a rocket. Traveling on a steep slant, there was no vibration, no mechanical noise; scarcely the suggestion of artificial movement, except for the muffled swishing of the air which the craft shot through. Were it not for the receding city below him, Chick could have imagined himself sitting

still in a house while a wind-storm tore by. He felt no change of temperature or any other ill effects; the cabin was fully enclosed, and heated by some invisible means. In short, ideal flight.

But they were still climbing, and getting hundreds of feet higher every instant. Looking down, Chick estimated that they were already a mile above the surface. It was the nearest he could conceive to traveling in a projectile. All in the utmost comfort.

For instance, the seats were swung on gimbals, so that no matter at what angle the craft might fly, the passengers would maintain level positions.

Below stretched the Mahovisal—a mighty city of domes and plazas, and, widely scattered, a few minarets. As before, it was hard to distinguish details in the flaming profusion of gemlike iridescence. At the southern end—or what Chick's sense of direction placed as the southern end—there was a vast, square plaza, covering hundreds of acres. Toward it, on two sides, converged scores of streets; they stretched away from it like the ribs of a giant fan.

On the remaining two sides of the plaza there was a tremendously large building, with a V-shaped front, opening on the square. The play of opal light on its many-bubbled roof resembled the glimmer from a vast pearl.

In the air above the city an uncountable number of very small objects darted hither and thither like sparkling fireflies. It was difficult to realize that they, as well as the June Bug, were aircraft.

To the west lay an immense expanse of silver, melting smoothly into the horizon. Watson took it to be the Thomahlian ocean. Then he looked up at the sky directly above him, and breathed a quick exclamation.

It was a single, small object, perfectly white, dropping out of the amethyst. It was coming down at a gentle angle from a height greater than the Himalayas. Tiny at first, almost instantly it assumed a proportion nearly colossal—a great bird, white as the breast of the snowdrift, swooping with the grace of the eagle and the speed of

the wind. It was so very large that it seemed, to Chick, that if all the other birds he had ever known were gathered together into one they would still be as the swallow. Down, down it came in a tremendous spiral, until it gracefully alighted in a splash of molten color upon the bosom of the silver sea. For a moment it was lost in a shower of water jewels—and then lay still, a swan upon the ocean.

"What is it, Geos?"

"The Kospian Limited, my lord. One of our great airships—a fast one, we consider it."

"It must accommodate a good many people, Rhamda."

"About nine thousand."

"You say it comes from Kospia. How far away is that?"

"About six thousand miles. It is an eight-hour run, with one stop. Just now the service is every fifteen minutes. They are coming, of course, for the Day of the Prophet."

Watson continued to watch the great airship, noting the swarm of smaller craft that came out from the Mahovisal to greet it, until the Jan Lucar suddenly altered the course. They stopped climbing, and struck out on a horizontal level. It left the Mahovisal behind them, a shimmering spot of fire beside the gleaming sea. They were traveling eastward. The landscape below was level and unvaried, of a greenish hue, and much like that of Chick's own earth in the early spring-time.

Being a Californian, Watson felt that they must soon encounter mountains. First there should be Diablo; then, on the other side of the San Joaquin Valley, the Sierra range. But neither materialized. There was only that vast expanse, level, and sometimes dotted with opalescent towns and cities. Ribbons of silver cut through the plain at intervals, crookedly lazy and winding, indicating a drainage from north to south, or *vice versa*. Looking back to the west, he could see the great, golden sun, poised as he had seen it that morning, a huge

amber plate on the rim of the world. It was sunset.

Then he looked straight ahead. Far in the distance a great wall loomed skyward to a terrific height. So vast was it and so remote, at first it had escaped the eye altogether. An incredibly high range of mountains, glowing with a faint rose blush under the touch of the setting sun. Against the sky were many peaks, each of them tipped with curious, sparkling, diamondlike coruscations. As Chick continued to gaze the rose began to purple.

The Jan Lucar put the craft to another upward climb. So high were they now that the Thomahlia below was totally lost from view; it was but a maze of lurking shadows. The sun was only a gash of amber—it was twilight down on the ground. And Watson watched the black line of the Thomahlian shadow climb the purple heights before him until only the highest crests and the jeweled crags flashed in the sun's last rays. Then, one by one, they flickered out; and all was darkness.

Still they ascended. Watson became uneasy, sitting there in the night.

"Where are we going?"

"To the Carbon Regions, my lord. It is one of the sights of the Thomahlia."

"On top of those mountains?"

"Beyond, my lord."

Whereupon, to Chick's growing amazement, the Geos went on to state that carbon of all sorts was extremely common throughout their world. The same forces that had formed coal so generously upon the earth had thrown up, almost as lavishly, huge quantities of pure diamond. The material was of all colors, as diamonds run, and considered of small value; for everyday purposes they preferred substances of more somber hues. They used it, it seemed, to build houses with.

"But how do you cut it?"

"Very easily. The material which drives this craft—Ilodium—will cut it like butter."

Later, Watson understood.* He watched

* NOTE—That there should be so many elements in the Thomahlia that are unknown here is parallel with the well known fact that certain minerals, like mercury, are to be found only in a few spots on earth. Incidentally, both iron and copper are exceedingly rare on the other side of the Blind Spot.

as the craft continued to climb; the Jan Lucar was steering without the aid of any outside lights whatever, there being only a small light illumining his instruments. Chick presently turned his gaze outside again; whereupon he got another jolt.

He saw—a *negative* sky!

At first he thought his eyes the victims of an illusion; then he looked closer. And he saw that it was true; instead of the familiar starry points of light against a velvet background, the arrangement was exactly reversed. Every constellation was in its place, just as Chick remembered it from the earth; but instead of stars there were jet-black spots, set upon a faint, gray background.

The whole sky was one huge Milky Way, except for the black dots. And from it all there shone just about as much total light as from the heavens he had known.

Of all he experienced, this was the most disturbing. It seemed totally against all reason; for he knew the stars to be great incandescent globes in space. How explain that they were here represented in reverse, their brilliance scattered and diffused over the surrounding sky, leaving points of blackness instead? Afterward he learned that the peculiar chemical constituency of the atmosphere was solely responsible for this inversion of the usual order of things.

All of a sudden the Jan Lucar switched the craft to a level. He held up one hand and pointed.

"Look, my lord, and the Rhamda! Look!"

Both men rose from their seats, the better to stare past the soldier. Straight ahead, where had been one of the corrugating peaks, a streak of blue fire shot skyward, a column of light miles high, differing from the beams of a search-light in that the rays were *wavy*, serpentine, instead of straight. It was weirdly beautiful. Geos caught his breath; he leaned forward and touched the Jan Lucar.

"Wait," said he in an awed tone. "Wait a moment. It has never come before, but we can expect it now." And even as he spoke, something wonderful happened.

From the base of the column two other streaks, one red and the other bright green,

cut out through the blackness on either side. The three streams started from the same point; they made a sort of trident, red, green, and blue—twisting, alive—strangely impressive, suggestive of grandeur and omnipotence—holy!

Again the Rhamda spoke. "Wait!" said he. "Wait!"

They were barely moving now. Watson watched and wondered. The three streams of light ran up and up, as though they would pierce the heavens; the eye could not follow to their ends. All in utter silence, nothing but those beams of glorified light, their reality a hint of power, of life and wisdom—of the certainty of things. Plainly it had a tremendous significance in the minds of the Geos and the Lucar; but their reverent interest was no greater than Watson's curiosity.

Then came the climax. Slowly, but somehow inexorably, like the laws of life itself, and somewhere at a prodigious height above the earth, the three outer ends of the red and the green and the blue spread out and flared back upon themselves and one another, until their combined brilliance bridged a great rainbow across the sky. Blending into all the colors of the prism, the bow became—for a moment—pregnant with an overpowering beauty, symbolical, portentous of something unusual and stupendous about to come out of the unknown to the Thomahlians. And next—

The bow began to move, to swirl, and to change in shape and in color. The three great rivers of light billowed and expanded and rounded into a new form. Then they burst—into a vast, three-leafed clover—blue and red and green!

And Watson caught the startled words of the Geos:

"The Sign of the Jarados!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE VOICE FROM THE VOID.

EVEN while that inexplicable heavenly pageant still burned against the heavens, something else took place, a thing of much greater importance to Chick. And it happened right before his eyes.

In the front of the car was a dial, slightly raised above the level of the various controlling instruments. And all of a sudden this dial, a small affair about six inches across, broke into light and life.

First, there was a white blaze that covered the whole disk; then the whiteness abruptly gave way to a flood of color, which resolved itself into a perfect miniature of the tricolored clover-leaf in the sky ahead. Chick saw, however, that the positions of the red and green were just the obverse of what glowed in the distance; and then he heard the voice, strong and distinct, speaking with a slight metallic twang as from some microphone hidden in that little, blazing, colored leaf:

"Listen, ye who have ears to listen!"

It was said in the Thomahlian tongue. The Geos breathed:

"The voice of the Prophet Jarados!"

But next moment the unseen speaker began in another language—clear, silver, musical—in English, and in a voice that Chick recognized!

"Chick! You have done well, my boy. Your courage and your intuition may lead us out. Follow the prophecy to the letter, Chick; it *must* come to pass, exactly as it is written! Don't fail to read it, there on the walis of the Temple of the Bell, when you encounter the Bar Senestro on the Day of the Prophet!"

"I have discovered many things, my boy, but I am not omnipotent. Your coming has made possible my one last hope that I may return to my own kind, and take with me the secrets of life. You have done right to trust to your instinct; have no fear, yet remember that if you—if we—make one false step we are lost.

"We must not let all that I have discovered go for nothing. The world—our world—must know what I now know.

"Finally, if you should succeed in your contest with the Senestro, I shall send for you; but if you fail, I know how to die.

"Return at once to the Mahovisal. Don't cross into the Region of Carbon. Take care how you go back; the Bars are waiting. But you can put full confidence in the Rhamdas."

Then the speaker dropped the language

of the earth, and used the Thomahlian tongue again: "It is I who speak—I, the prophet; the Prophet Jarados!"

All in the voice of Dr. Holcomb.

The blazing leaf faded into blackness, and the talking ceased. Chick was glad of the darkness; the whole thing was like magic, and too good to believe. The first actual words from the missing professor! Each syllable was frozen into Watson's memory.

The Geos was clutching his arm.

"Did you understand it, my lord? We heard the voice of the prophet! What did he say?"

"Yes, I understood. He used his own language—my language. And he said"—taking the reins firmly into his hands—"he said that we must return at once. We must not go on; we must return to the Thomahlia. And we must beware of the Bars."

There was no thought of questioning him. Without awaiting the Geos's command, the Jan Lucar began putting the craft about. Watson glanced at the sky; the great spectacle was gone; and he demanded of the soldier:

"How can we get back? How do we find our way?"

For there was no visible light, save the strange, fitful glow from that uncanny sky, to guide them; no lights from the inky carpet of the Thomahlia, lights such as one would expect for the benefit of fliers. But the soldier touched a button, and instantly another and larger dial was illumined above the instruments.

It revealed a map or chart of a vast portion of the Thomahlia. On the farther edge there appeared an area colored to represent water, and adjoining this area was a square spot labeled "The Mahovisal." And about midway from this point to the near edge of the dial a red dot hung, moving slowly, over the chart.

"The red dot, my lord, indicates the position of the June Bug," explained the Jan. "In that manner we know at all times where we are located, and which way we are flying. We shall arrive in the Mahovisal shortly."

As he spoke the craft was gaining speed,

and soon was traveling at an even greater rate than before. The red dot began to crawl at an astonishing speed. Of course, they had the benefit of the pull of gravity, now; apparently they would make the journey in a few minutes. But incredible though the speed might be, there was nothing but the red dot to show it.

The Geos felt like talking. "My lord, the sign is conclusive. It is a marvel, such as only the prophet could possibly have produced; with all our science we could not duplicate such splendor. Only once before has the Thomahlia seen it."

Already they were near enough to the surface to make out the clustered, blinking lights of the towns on the plain below. Ahead of them queer streamers of pale rays thrust through the darkness. Watson recognized them as the beams of far-distant search-lights; and then and there he gave thanks for one thing, at least, in which the Thomahlia had seemingly progressed no further than the people of the earth.

Coming a little nearer, Chick made out a number of bright, glittering, insect-like objects, revealed by these search-lights. The Jan Lucar said:

"The Bars, my lord. They are waiting; and they will head us off if they can."

"The work of Senestro, I suppose. I thought he claimed to some honor."

"It is not the prince's work, my lord," replied the soldier. "His D'Hartian and Kospian followers, some of them, have no scruples as to how they might slay the 'false one,' as they think you."

"Suppose," hazarded Watson, "suppose I were the false one?"

Both the Geos and the Jan smiled. But the Rhamda's voice was very sure as he replied:

"If you were false, my lord, I would slay you myself."

Watson was glad that, although ethics was against him in the abstract, yet the right was on his side. He didn't like it, but there was now no backing out. It was not only his own welfare; there was the Aradna, and the life of the professor at stake. Moreover, there were the truths which the doctor had discovered: these must all be weighed against the mere fact that Chick

was actually, in his own mind, a fraud. It became a little thing alongside the great fact that he must now play the part of a superman.

They were very near the Mahovisal. Below was the unmistakable opalescence, somehow produced by powerful illumination, as intense as sunlight itself. The red dot was almost above the black square on the lighted chart. And, directly ahead, the air was becoming alive with the beam-revealed aircraft. How could they get by in safety?

But Chick did not know the Jan Lucar. The soldier said:

"My lord is not uneasy?"

"Of course not," with vast unconcern. "Why?"

"Because I propose something daring. I am free to admit, my lord, that were the Geos and I alone, I should not attempt it. But not even the Bars," with magnificent confidence, "can stand before us now! We have had the proof of the Jarados, and we know that no matter what the odds, he will carry us through."

"What are you going to do?"

"I propose to shoot it, my lord." And without explaining the Jan asked the Geos: "Are you agreeable? The June Bug will hold; the prophet will protect us."

"Surely," returned the Rhamda. "There is nothing to fear, now, for those who are in the company of the chosen."

Watson wonderingly watched the Jan as he tilted the nose of the June Bug and began to climb at an all but perpendicular angle straight into the heavens. And if their former ascent had been like that of a rocket, it was now almost as swift as thought. Mile after mile, in less than as many minutes, they hurtled toward the zenith, so that the lights of the city dimmed until only the searching shafts could be seen. Chick began to guess what they were going to do; that the Jan Lucar was nearly as reckless as he was handsome.

At last the soldier brought the craft to a level. They soared along horizontally for a while; the Jan kept his eye fixed upon the red dot. And when it was directly above the black square he stated:

"It is considered a perilous feat, my

lord. We are going to drop. If we make it from this height, not only will we break all records, but we will have proven the June Bug the superior in this respect, as she is in speed. It is our only chance under any circumstances, but with the Jarados at our side, we need not fear that the craft will stand the strain. We shall go through them like a stone; before they know it we shall be in the drome—in less than a minute."

"From this height?" Chick concealed a shudder behind a fair show of skepticism. "A minute is not much time."

"Does my lord fear the drop?"

"Why should I? I have in mind the June Bug; she might be set afire through friction, in dropping so quickly through the air." Watson had a vivid picture of a blazing meteorite, containing the charred bodies of three men, dropping out of—

"My lord need not be concerned with that," the Jan assured him. "The shell of the car is provided with a number of tiny pores, through which a heat-resisting fluid will be pumped during the maneuver. The temperature may be raised a trifle, but no more."

"You see this plug," touching a hitherto unused knob among the instruments. "By pulling that out, the mechanism of the craft is automatically adjusted to care for every phase of the descent. Nothing else remains to be done, after removing that plug, save to watch the red dot and prepare to step out upon the floor of our starting-place."

"Has the thing ever been done before?" Watson was sparring for time while he gathered his nerve.

"I myself have seen it, my lord. The June Bug has been sent up many times, weighted with ballast; the plug was abstracted by clockwork; and in fifty-eight seconds she returned through the open end of her drome, without a hitch. It was beautiful. I have always envied her that plunge. And now I shall have the chance, with the hand of the Jarados as my guide and protector!"

Chick had just time to reflect that, if by any chance he got through with this, he ought to be able to pass any test conceivable. He ought to be able to get away with

anything. He started to murmur a prayer; but before he could finish, the Jan Lucar leaned over the dial-map for the last time, saw that the red dot was now exactly central over the square that represented the city, and unhesitatingly jerked out the plug.

Of what happened next Watson remembered but little. The bottom seemed to have dropped out of the universe. He was conscious of a crushing blur of immensity, of a silent thundering within him—then, mental chaos, and a stunned oblivion.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHO IS THE JARADOS?

IT was all over. Chick opened his eyes to see the Jan throwing open the plate on the side of the compartment. Neither the soldier nor the Rhamda seemed to have noted Chick's daze. As for the Jan, his blue eyes were dancing with daredeviltry.

"That's what I call living!" he grinned. "They can keep on looking for the June Bug all night! She's a great little boat!"

Chick looked out. They were inside the great room from which they had started; the trip was over; the plunge had been made in safety. Chick took a long breath, and held out a hand.

"A man after my own heart, Jan Lucar. I foresee that we may have great sport with the Senestro."

"Aye, my lord," cheerfully. "The presumptuous usurper! I only wish I could kill him, instead of you."

"You are not the only one," commented the Rhamda. "Half of the Rhamdas would cheerfully act as the chosen's proxy."

And so ended the events of Chick Watson's first day beyond the Blind Spot, his first day on the Thomahlia; that is, disregarding his previous months of unconsciousness. He had good reason to pass a sleepless night, in legitimate worry for the outcome of it all; but instead he slept the sound sleep of exhaustion, awakening the next morning much refreshed.

He reminded himself, first of all, that today was the one immediately preceding that of his test—the Day of the Prophet. He

had only a little more than twenty-four hours to prepare. What was the best and wisest proceeding?

He called for the Geos. He told him what data he wanted. The Rhamda said that he could find everything in a library in that building; and inside a half-hour he returned with a pile of manuscript, such as indicated that the library was run on a loose-leaf plan.

Left to himself, Chick found that he now had data relating to all the sciences, to religion, to education and political history and the law. The same array of exact information, if gleaned from the corresponding volumes found on the earth, would have required a truck-load of books.

The chronology of the Thomahlians, Chick found, dates back no less than fifteen thousand years.* An abiding civilization of that antiquity, it need not be said, presented somewhat different aspects than from what is known on the earth.

It seemed that the Jarados had made his first appearance at an age corresponding with the twentieth century upon the earth. Conditions were about the same. There was absolutely no doubt that the man had come miraculously. That is, he had come out of the unknown, through a channel which he himself later termed the Spot of Life. He had taught a religion of enlightenment, embracing intelligence, love, virtue, and the higher ethics such as are inherent to all great philosophies. But he did not call himself a religionist. That was the queer point. He said that he had come to teach an advanced philosophy of life; and he expressly stated that his teachings were absolute only to a limited extent.

"Man must seek and find," was one of his epigrams; "and if he find no more truths, then he will find lies." Which was merely a negative way of saying that some of his philosophy was only provisional.

But on some points he was adamant. He had arrived at a time when the unthinking, self-glorifying Thomahlians had all but exterminated the lower orders of creation.

The Jarados sought to remove the handicap which the people had set upon themselves, and gave them, in the place of the kindness which they had forgotten how to use, a burning desire for a positive knowledge, where before had been only blind faith. Also, he taught good-fellowship, as a means to this end, and thus indirectly helped to bring on the semisocialistic era which economic conditions was working toward. He taught beauty, love, and laughter, the three great cleansers of humanity. And yet, through it all—

The Jarados was a mystic.

He studied life after a manner of his own. He was a stickler for getting down to the very heart of things, for prodding around among causes until he found the cause of the cause itself. And thus he learned the secret of the occult.

For so he taught. And presently the Jarados was recognized as an authority on what the Thomahlia called "the next world." Only, he showed that death, instead of being an ushering into a void, was merely a translation into another plane of life, a higher plane and a more glorious one; in short, a thing to be desired and attained to, not to be avoided.

This put the Spot of Life on an entirely different basis. No longer was it a fear-some thing. The Jarados elevated death to the plane of motherhood—something to glory in. And Chick gathered that his famous prophecy—which he had yet to read, where it hung on the wall of the temple—this prophecy gave every detail of the Jarados's profound convictions and teachings regarding the mystery of the next life.

And now comes a curious thing. As Chick read these details, he became more and more conscious of—what shall it be called?—the presence of some one or something beside him, above and all about him, watching his every movement. He could not get away from the feeling, although it was broad daylight, and he was seemingly quite alone in the room. Chick was not frightened; but he could have sworn that

* NOTE—For the purposes of this account it will be unnecessary to relate any more of what Mr. Watson learned than has a bearing upon his adventures. Students are referred to such papers as Professor Herold, Sir Henry Hodges and Drs. Malloy and Higgins have given to the world in various periodicals.

a very real personality was enveloping his own as he read.

Every word, somehow, reminded him of the miraculous sequence of facts as he knew them: the unerring accuracy with which he, quite unthinkingly and almost without volition, had solved problem after problem, although the chances were totally against him.

He became more and more convinced that he himself had practically no control over his affairs; that he was in the hands of an irresistible Fate; and that—he could not help but think it—his good angel was none other than the prophet who, almost ninety centuries before, had lived and taught upon the Thomahlia, and had in the end returned to the unknown.

But how could such a thing be? Watson did not even know where he was! Small wonder that, again and again, he felt the need of assurance. He asked for the Jan Lucar.

"In the first place," began Chick without preamble, "you accept me, Jan Lucar; do you not?"

"Absolutely, my lord."

"You conceive me to be out of the spiritual world, and yet flesh and blood like yourself?"

"Of course," with flat conviction.

That settled it. Watson decided to find out something he had not had time to locate in the library.

"The Rhamda may have told you, Jan Lucar, that I am here to seek the Jarados. Now, I suspect the Senestro. Can you imagine what he has done to the prophet?"

"My lord," remonstrated the other, "daring as the Bar might be, he could do nothing to the Jarados. He would not dare."

"Then he is afraid to run counter to the prophecy?"

"Yes, my lord; that is, its literal interpretation. He is opposed only to the broader version as held by such liberals as the Rhamda Avec. The Bars are always warning the people against the false one."

"And the Senestro is at their head," mused Chick aloud. "This brother of his who died—usually there are two such princes and chiefs?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And Senestro plans to marry both queens, according to the custom!"

"My lord"—and the Jan suddenly snapped erect—"the Bar will do exceedingly well if he succeeds in marrying *one* of them! Certainly he shall never have the Aradna—not while I live and can fight!"

"Good! How about the Nervina?"

"He'll do well to find her first!"

"True enough. What would you say was his code of honor?"

"My lord, the Senestro actually has no code. He believes in nothing. He is so constituted, mentally and morally, that he cares for and trusts in none but himself. He is a skeptic pure and simple; he cares nothing for the Jarados and his teachings. He is an opportunist seeking for power, wicked, lustful, cruel—"

"But a good sportsman!"

"In what way, my lord?"

"Didn't he allow me the choice of combat?"

The Jan laughed, but his handsome face could not hide his contempt.

"It is ever so with a champion, my lord. He has never been defeated in a matter of physical prowess. It would be far more to his glory to overcome you in a combat of your own selection. It will be spectacular—he knows the value of dramatic climax—and he would kill you in a supreme moment, before a million Thomahlans."

"It's a nice way to die," said Watson. "You must grant that much."

"I don't know of any nice way to die, my lord. But it is a good way of living—to kill the Bar Senestro. I would that I could have the honor."

"How does it come that the Rhamdas, superintellectual as they are, can consent to such a contest? Is it not degrading, to their way of thinking? It smacks of barbarism."

"They do not look upon it in that light, my lord. Our civilization has passed beyond snobbery. Of course, there was a time, centuries ago, when we were taught that any physical contest was brutal. But that was before we knew better."

"You don't believe it now?"

"By no means, my lord. The most wonderful physical thing in the Thomahlia is the human body. We do not hide it. We admire beauty, strength, prowess. The live body is above all art; it is the work of God himself; art is but an imitation. And there is nothing so splendid as a physical contest—the quick, lightning correlation of mind and body. It is a picture of life."

"Do the Rhamdas think this?"

"Most assuredly. A Rhamda is always first an athlete."

"Why?"

"Perfection, my lord. A perfect mind does not always dwell in a perfect body, but they strive for it as much as possible. The first test of a Rhamda is his body. After he passes that he must take the mental test."

"Mental?"

"Moral first. The most rigid, perhaps, of all; he must be a man above suspicion. The honor of a Rhamda must never be questioned. He must be upright and absolutely unselfish. He must be broad-minded, human, lovable, and a leader of men. After that, my lord, comes the intellectual test."

"He must be a learned man."

"Not exactly, your lordship. There are many very learned men who could not be Rhamdas; and there are many who have had no learning at all who eventually were admitted. The qualifications are intellectual, not educational; the mind is put to a rigid test. It is examined for alertness, perception, memory, reason, emotion, and control. There is no greater honor in all the Thomahlia."

"And they are all athletes?"

"Every one, my lord. In all the world there is no finer body of men. I myself would hesitate before entering a match with even the old Rhamda Geos."

"How about the Rhamda Avec?"

"Nor he, either; in the gymnasium he was always the superior, just as he topped all others morally and mentally."

Did this explain the Avec's physical prowess, on the one hand, and the fact that he would not stoop to take that ring by force, on the other?

"Just one thing more, Jan Lucar: You

"have absolutely no fear that I may fail tomorrow?"

"Not the slightest, my lord. You cannot fail!"

"Why not?"

"I have already said—because you are from the Jarados."

And Chick, facing the greatest experience of his life, submerged in a sea wherein only a few islands of fact were visible, had to be content with this: his only friends were those who were firmly convinced of something which, he knew only too well, was a flat fraud! All his backing was based upon a misled faith.

No, not quite. Was there not that strange feeling that the Jarados himself was at his back? And had he not found that the prophet had been real? Did he not feel, as positively as he felt anything, that the Jarados was still a reality?

Chick went to bed that night with a light heart.

CHAPTER XL.

THE TEMPLE OF THE BELL.

IT was hard for Chick to remember all the details of that great day. Throughout all the morning and afternoon he remained in his apartments. Breakfast over, the Rhamdas told him his part in certain ceremonies, such as need not be detailed here. They were very solicitous as to his food and comfort, and as to his feelings and anticipations. His nonchalance pleased them greatly. Afterward he had a bath and rub-down.

A combat to the death, was it to be? Suits me, thought Watson. He was never in finer form.

The Jan Lucar was particularly interested. He pinched and stroked Chick's muscles with the caressing pride of a connoisseur. Watson stepped out of the fountain bath in all the vigor of health. He playfully reached out for the Lucar and tripped him up. He sought to learn just what the Thomahlans knew in the art of self-defense.

The brief struggle that ensued taught him that he need expect no easy conquest,

The Jan was quick, active, and the possessor of a science peculiarly effective. The Thomahlians did not box in the manner of Anglo-Saxons; their mode was peculiar. Chick foresaw that he would be compelled to combine the methods of three kinds of combat: boxing, jiu-jitsu, and the good old catch-as-catch-can wrestling. If the Senestro were superior to the Jan, he would have a time indeed. Though Watson conquered, he could not but concede that the Jan was not only clever but scientific to an oily, bewildering degree.

The Lucar held up.

"Enough, my lord! You are a man indeed. Do not overdo; save yourself for the Senestro."

His eyes were smiling. His fingers twitched with eagerness and the delight of contest. He was a strong man, alert and nervy. The California athlete could not but admire this civilization that put a premium instead of disgrace upon the rivalry of clean, healthy manhood.

Clothes were brought, and Chick taken back to his apartment. The time passed with Rhamdas constantly at his side. They were taking conscientious care with his every movement.

The Geos was not present, nor the little queen. Chick sought permission to sit by the window—permission that was granted after the guards had placed screens that would withhold any view from outside, yet permit Chick to look out.

As far as he could see, the avenues were packed with people. Only, this time the centers of the streets were clear; on the curbs he could see the opposing lines of blue and crimson, holding back the waiting thousands. In the distance he could hear chimes, faint but distinct, like silver bells tinkling over water.

Between the intervals strange choruses of weird, holy music. The full sweep of the city's domes and minarets were spread out before him. From eaves to basements the rolling luxuriance of orchidian beauty; banners, music, parade; a day of pageant, pomp, and fulfilment.

He could catch the pregnancy of the air, the strange, laden undercurrent of spiritual salvation—something esoteric, undefin-

able, the ecstasy of a million souls pulsing to the throb of a supreme moment. He drew back. Some one had touched him.

"What is it?"

It was one of the Rhamdas. He had in his hand a small metal clover, of the design of the Jarados.

"What do I do?" asked Watson.

"This," said the Rhamda, "was sent to you by one of the Bars."

"By a Bar! What does it mean?"

The other shook his head. "It was sent to you by one who wished it to be known by us that he is your friend, even though a Bar."

Just then Watson noted something sticking out of the edge of one of the leaves. He pulled it out. It was a piece of paper. On it was scrawled words *in English*.

The writing was penciled script, done in a poor hand and ill-spelled, but still English. Chick read:

Arrah, me boy! Be of good cheer; there ain't a one in this world that can top a lad from Frisco. And it's Pat MacPherson that says it. Yer the finest laddie that ever got beyond the old witch of Endor. You and me, if we hold on, is just about goin' to play hell with the haythen. Hold on an fight like the devil! Remember that Pat is with ye!

We're both spooks.

PAT MACPHERSON.

Said Watson: "Who gave you this? Did you see the man?"

"It was sent up, my lord. The man was a high Bar in the Senestro's guard."

Watson could not understand this. Was it possible that there were others in this mysterious region besides himself? At any rate, he wasn't exactly alone. He felt that he could count upon the Irish—or was the fellow Scotch? Anyhow, such a man would find the quick means of wit at a supreme moment.

Suddenly Watson noticed a queer feeling of emptiness. He looked out of the window. The music had ceased, and the incessant hum of the throngs had deadened to silence. It was suspended, awesome, threatening. At the same time, the Jan Lucar came to attention; at the opposite door stood the Rhamda Geos, black clad, surrounded by a group of his fellows.

"Come, my lord," said he.

The crimson guard fell in behind Watson, the black-gowned took their places ahead, and the Jan Lucar and the Geos walked on either side. They stepped out in the corridor. By the indicator of a vertical clock* Chick noted that it was nine. He did not know the day of the year other than from the Thomahlian calendar; but he knew that it was close to sunset. He did not ask where they were going; there was no need. The very solemnity of his companions told him more than would have done their answers. In a moment they were in the streets.

Watson had thought that they would be taken by aircraft, or that they would pass through the building. He did not know that it was a concession to the Bar Senestro; that the Senestro was but playing a bit of psychology that is often practised by lesser champions. If Watson's nerve was not broken it was simply because of the iron indifference of confident health. Chick had never been defeated. He had no fear. He was far more curious as to the scenes and events about him than he was of the outcome. He was hoping for some incident that would link itself up into explanation.

At the door a curious car of graceful lines was waiting, an odd affair that might be classed as a cross between a bird and a gondola, streaming with colors and of magnificent workmanship and design. On the deck of this the three men took their places; on the one side the Rhamda Geos, tall, somber, immaculate; on the other, the magnificent Jan Lucar in the gorgeous crimson uniform, gold-braided and studded with jewels; on his head he wore the shako of purple down; and by his side a peculiar black weapon which he wore much in the manner of a sword.

In the center, Watson—bareheaded, his torso bare and his arms naked. He had been given a pair of soft sandals, and a short suit, whose one redeeming feature in his eyes was a pocket into which he had thrust the automatic that he valued so much. It was more like a picture of Rome

than anything else. Whatever the civilization of the Thomahlians, their ritual in Watson's eyes smacked still of barbarism.

But he was intensely interested in all about him. The avenues were large. On either side the guards were drawn up eight deep, holding back the multitude that pressed and jostled with the insistent pandemonium of curiosity. He looked into the myriad of faces about him, splendid features, of intelligent men and women.

Not one face suggested the hideous; the women were especially beautiful, and from what he could see, finely formed and graceful. Even the older ones had a vigorous refinement that was wonderfully becoming. Many of them smiled; he could hear the curious buzz of conjecturing whispers. Some were indifferent, while others, from the expression of their faces, were openly hostile.

Chick was in the middle of a procession, the Rhamdas marching before and the crimson guard bringing up the rear. A special guard; the inner one, Rhamdas, the outer one of crimson surrounding them all.

The car started. There was no trace of friction; it was noiseless, automatic. Chick could only conjecture as to its mechanism. The black column of Rhamdas moved ahead rhythmically, with the swing of solemn grandeur. For some minutes they marched through the streets of the Mahovisal. There was no cheering; it was a holy, awesome occasion. Chick could sense the undercurrent of the staring thousands, the reverence and the piety. It was the Day of the Prophet. They were staring at miracle.

The column turned a corner. For the first time Watson was staggered by sheer immensity; for the first time he felt what it might be to see with the eyes of an insect. His heart went faint with insignificance. Had he been an ant looking up at the columns of Karnak, he would still have been out of proportion. It was immense, colossal, beyond man. It was of the omnipotent. It was the pillared portal of the Temple of the Bell.

*NOTE—These clocks resembled large thermometers in appearance. They were a sort of liquid hour-glass, so arranged that when the last hour of the day was reached, the apparatus automatically up-ended, so that the process began all over again.

Such a building a genius might dream of, in a moment of unhampered, inspired imagination. It was stupendous. The pillars were hexagonal in shape, and in diameter each of about the size of an ordinary house. Dropping from an immense height, it seemed as if they had originally been poured out in the form of molten metal from immense bell-like flares that fell from the vaulted architrave. Such was the design.

Chick got the impression that the top of the structure, somehow, was not supported by the foundation, but rather the reverse—the floor was suspended from the ceiling. It was the work of Titans. So high and stupendous that at the first instant Watson felt numb with insignificance. What chance had he against men of such colossal conception?

How large the building was he could not see. The Gargantuan façade itself was enough to smother comprehension. It was laid out in the form of a triangle, one end of which was open toward the city; the two sections of the façade met under a huge, arched opening—the door itself. Watson recognized the structure as the one he had seen from the June Bug on the outskirts of the Mahovisal. The enormous plaza was packed with people, leaving only a narrow lane for the procession; and as far back as Chick could see the streets converged toward this vast space. Their numbers were incalculable. It was Benaric; it was prodigious.

The car stopped. The guards, both crimson and blue, formed a twentyfold cordon. Watson could feel the suspended breath of the waiting multitude. The three men stepped out—the Geos first, then the Jan Lucar, and Watson last. Chick caught the Lucar's eye; it was confident; the man was springing with vigor, jovial in spite of the moment.

"All waiting for you, my lord. The Senestro has chosen many witnesses to his folly. It will be a spectacle worthy of a place in history."

"Aye," supplemented the Geos. "Pride hath a fall."

But Watson was not so sure.

They passed between two of the huge

pillars, and under the giant arch. To Chick it was much like walking between the supports of Atlas. The effect was so great that whenever he looked up he felt dizzy. For a few minutes they passed through what seemed, to Chick, a perfect maze of those titanic columns. And every foot of their way was marked by the lines of crimson and of blue, flanking either side.

Chick knew something of archeology and history. But it was the first time he had ever stepped out of his own epoch. Whether he was in the dim past or the far future he could not make out. A monster building, half temple and half auditorium, a Karnak coliseum; either it was a throw-back to Babylonian immensity or a conception of the future, a concept half godlike, half human, the work of Titans and Cyclopean civilization.

An immense sea of people rose high into the forest of pillars as far as his eye could reach. He had never been in such a concourse of humanity. He had been in bowls, in athletic auditoriums that held one hundred thousand spectators; but they did not approach this. It was superlative, the last thing to be thought of—and a building.

They passed through an inner arch, a smaller and lower one, into what Chick guessed was the temple proper. And if Chick had thought the anteroom stupendous, he now saw that a new word, one which went beyond all previous experience, was needed to describe what he now saw.

It was almost too immense to be grasped in its entirety. Gone was the maze of columns; instead, far, far away to the right and to the left, stood single rows of herculean pillars. There were but seven on a side, separated by great distances; and between them stretched a space so immense, so incredibly vast, that a small city could have been housed within it. And over it all was not the open sky, but a ceiling of such terrific grandeur that Chick almost halted the procession while he gazed.

For that ceiling was the under-side of a cloud, a gray-black, forbidding thundercloud. And the fourteen pillars, seven on either side, were prodigious waterspouts, monster spirals of the hue of storm, with flaring sweeps at top and at bottom that

welded roof and floor in one terrific whole. Sheer from side to side stretched that portentous level cloud; it was a span like the span of an epoch; and on either side it was rooted in those awful columns, seemingly alive, as though ready at any instant to suck up the earth into the infinite.

By downright will-force Watson tore his attention away and directed it upon the other features of that unprecedented interior. It was lighted, apparently, by great windows behind the fourteen pillars; windows too far away to be distinguishable. And the light revealed, directly ahead—

Something that Chick at first thought to be a cascade of black water. It leaped out of the rear wall of the temple, and at its crest it was bordered with walls of solid silver, cut across and designed with scrolls of gold and gem work; walls that swooped down and ended with two huge green columns at the base of that fantastic fall.

As they approached a swarm of tiny bronze objects, silver winged, fluttered out through the temple—tiny birds, smaller than swallows, beautiful and swift-winged, illusive. They were without number; in a moment the air of the temple was alive with flitting, darting spots of glinting color.

Then Chick saw that there were two people, mere marionettes in the distance, sitting high on the crest of that cascade. Wondering, Chick and the rest marched on through the silent crowd; all standing with bared heads and bated breaths, the worshipping Thomahlians filled every inch of that enormous place. Only a narrow lane permitted the procession to pass toward the base of that puzzling, silent, black water-fall.

They were almost at its base when Chick saw the vanguard of the Rhamdas unhesitatingly stride straight against the torrent, and then mount upon it. Up they marched; and Chick knew that the black water was black jade, and that the two people at its crest were seated upon a landing at the top of the grandest stairway he had ever seen.

Up went the Rhamdas deploying to right and left against the silver walls. The crimson and blue uniformed guards remained behind, lining the lane through the throng.

At the foot of the steps Chick stopped and looked around, and again he felt numb at the sheer vastness of it all.

For he was looking now at the portal through which the procession had marched; a portal now closed; and above it, covering a great expanse of that wall and extending up almost into the brooding cloud above, was spread a mighty replica of the tri-colored Sign of the Jarados.

For the first time Chick felt the full significance of symbolism. Whereas before it had been but an incident of adventure, now it was the symbol of mystic revelation. It was not only the motif for all other decoration upon the walls and minor elements of the temple; it was the emblem of the trinity, deep, holy, significant of the mystery of the universe and the hereafter.

There was something deeper than mere fatalism; back of it all was the fact-rooted faith of a civilization. Watson had stepped into it all. The whole scene was enough to stagger him; he felt hazy, bewildered, unable to credit himself as a conscious unit in all this immensity.

But at that moment, as Chick paused with one foot on the bottom step of the flight, something happened that sent quivers of joy and confidence all through him. Some one was talking—talking in English!

Chick looked. The speaker was a man in the blue garb of the Senestro's guard. He was standing at the end of the line nearest the stair, and slightly in front of his fellows. Like the rest, he was holding his weapon, a black, needle-pointed sword, at salute. Chick gave him only a glance, then had presence of mind to look elsewhere as the man said, in a low, guarded voice:

"Ye air right, me lad; don't look at me. I know what ye're t'inkin'. But she ain't as bad as she looks! Keep yer heart clear; dinna fear. You an' me kin lick all Thomahlia! Go straight up on them stairs, an' stand that blagguard Senastro on his 'ead, jist like ye'd do in Frisco!"

"Who are you?" asked Watson, intent upon the great three-leafed clover. He used the same low, cautious tone the other had employed. "Who are you, friend?"

"Pat MacPherson, av coorse," was the

answer. "An' Oi've said a plenty. Now, go aboot yer business."

Watson did not quibble. There was no time to learn more. He did not wish it to be noticed; yet he could not hide it from the Jan Lucar and the Rhamda Geos, who were still at his side. They had heard that tongue before. The looks they exchanged told, however, that they were gratified rather than displeased by the interruption. Certainly all feeling of depression left Chick, and he ascended the stairs with a glad heart and a resilient stride that could not but be noticed.

He was ready for the Senestro.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE PROPHECY.

REACHING the top of the jade steps, Chick found the landing to be a great dais, nearly a hundred feet across. On the right and left this dais was hedged in by the silver walls, on each of which was hung a huge, golden scroll-work. These scrolls bore legends, which for the moment Chick ignored. At the rear of the dais was a large object like a bronze bell.

The floor was of the usual mosaic, except in the center, where there was a plain, circular design. Chick took careful note of this, a circle about twenty feet across, as white and unbroken as a bed of frozen snow. Whether it was stone or not he could not determine. All around its edges was a gap that separated it from the dais, a gap several inches across. Chick turned to Geos:

"The Spot of Life?"

"Even so. It is the strangest thing in all the Thomahlia, my lord. Can you feel it?"

For Watson had reached out with his toe and touched the white surface. He drew it back suddenly.

"It has a feeling," he replied, "that I cannot describe. It is cold, and yet it is not. Perhaps it is my own magnetism."

"Ah! It is well, my lord!"

What the Rhamda meant by that Chick could not tell. He was interested in the odd white substance. It was as smooth as

glass, although at intervals there were faint, almost imperceptible, dark lines, like the finest scratches in old ivory. Yet the whiteness was not dazzling. Again Watson touched it with his foot, and noted the inexplicable feeling of exhilaration. In the moment of absorption he quite forgot the concourse about him. He knew that he was now standing on the crux of the Blind Spot.

But in a minute he turned. The dais was a sort of nave, with one end open to the stairway. Seated on his left was the frail Aradna, occupying a small, throne-like chair of some translucent green material. On the right sat the Bar Senestro, in a chair differing only in that its color was a bright blue. In the center of the dais stood a third chair—a crimson one—empty.

The Senestro stood up. He was royally clad, his breast gleaming with jewels. He was certainly handsome; he had the carriage of confident royalty. Chick noted the clearness of his eyes and the pink, healthy muscles of his arms. The smile on his lips was a bit disconcerting; there was no fear in the man, no uncertainty, no weakness. If confidence were a thing of strength, the Senestro were already the victor. Down in his heart Chick secretly admired him.

But just then the Aradna stood up. She made an indication to Watson. He stepped over to the little queen. She sat down again.

"I want to give you my benediction, stranger lord. Are you sure of yourself? Can you overcome the Senestro?"

"I am certain," spoke Watson. "It is for the little queen, O Aradna. I know nothing of the prophecy; but I will fight for you!"

She blushed, and cast a furtive look in the direction of the Senestro.

"It is well," she spoke. "The outcome will have a double interpretation—the spiritual one of the prophecy, and the earthly, material one that concerns myself. If you conquer, my lord, I am freed. I would not marry the Senestro; I love him not. I would abide by the prophet, and await the chosen." She hesitated. "What do you know of the chosen, my lord?"

"Nothing, O Aradna."

"Has not the Rhamda Geos told you?"

"Partly, but not fully. There is something that he is withholding."

"Very likely. And now—will you kneel, my lord?"

Watson knelt. The little queen held out her hand. Behind him Chick could hear a deep murmur from the assembled multitudes. Just what was the significance of that sound he did not know; nor did he care. It was enough for him that he was to fight for this delicately beautiful maiden. He would let the prophecy take care of itself.

Besides these three on the dais there were only the Rhamda Geos and the Jan Lucar. These two remained on the edge nearest the body of the temple, the edge at the crest of the stair. The empty chair remained so.

Suddenly Chick remembered the warning of Dr. Holcomb: "Read the words of the prophet." And he took advantage of the breathing-spell to peruse the legends on the great, golden scrolls:

THE PROPHECY OF THE JARADOS.

Behold! When the day is at hand, prepare ye! For, when that day cometh, ye shall have signs and portents from the world beyond. Wisdom cometh out of life, and life walketh out of wisdom. Yea, in the manner of life and of spirit ye shall have them, and of substance even like unto yourselves.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that ye shall be on guard. By these signs ye shall know them; even by the truths I have taught thee. The way of life is an open door; wisdom and virtue are its keys. And when thy intelligence shall be lifted to the plane above—then shalt thou know!

Mark ye well the Spot of Life! He that openeth it, is the precursor of judgment. Mark him well!

And thus shall the last days come to pass. See that ye are worthy, O wise ones! For behold, in those last days there shall come among ye—

The chosen of a line of kings. First there shall be one, and then there shall be two; and the two shall stay but the one shall return;

The false ones. Them ye shall slay!

The four-footed: The call to humility, sacrifice

and devotion, whom ye shall hold in reverence even as ye hold me, the Jarados.

And on the last day of all—T, the Jarados!

Beware ye of sacrilege! Lest I take from ye all that I have given ye, and the day be postponed—beware ye of sacrilege!

And if the false ones cometh not, ye shall know that I have held them. Know ye the day!

Sixteen days from the day of the prophet, shall come the day of the judgment; and the way shall be opened, on the last day, the sixteenth day of the Jarados.

Hearken to the words of the Jarados, the prophet and mouthpiece of the infinite intelligence, ruler of justice, peace, and love! So be it forever!

Chick read it the second time. Like all prophecies, it was a bit Delphic; but he could get the general drift. In that golden script he was looking into the heart of all Thomahlia—into its greatness, its culture, its civilization itself. It was the soul of the Blind Spot, the reason and the whereof of all about him.

He heard some one step up behind him, and he turned. It was the Senestro, going over the words of the prophecy.

"Can you read it, Sir Fantom?" asked the handsome Bar. His black eyes were twinkling with sheer delight. "Have you read it all?"

He put a hand on Chick's shoulder. It was a careless act, almost friendly. Either he had the heart of a devil or the chivalry of a Norman. He pointed to a line:

"The false ones. Them ye shall slay."

"And if I were the false one, you would slay me?" asked Watson.

"Aye, truly!" answered the splendid prince. "You are well made and good to look upon. I shall hold you in my arms; I shall hear your bones crack; it shall be sweeter music than that of the temple pheasants; who never sing but for the Jarados. I shall slay you upon the Spot, Sir Fantom!"

Watson turned on his heel. The ethics of the Senestro was not of his own code. He was not afraid; he stood beside the Jan Lucar and gazed out into the body of the temple. As far as he could see, under and

past the fourteen great pillars and right up to the far wall, the floor was a vast carpet of humanity.

It was become dark. Presently a new kind of light began to glow far overhead, gradually increasing in strength until the whole place was suffused with a sunlike illumination. The Rhamda Geos began to speak.

"In the last day, in the Day of Life. We have the substance of ourselves, and the words of the prophet. The Jarados has written his prophecy in letters of gold, for all to see. 'The false ones. Them ye shall slay.' It is the will of the Rhamdas that the great Bar Senestro shall try the proof of the occult. On this, the first of the Sixteen Days, the test shall be—on the Spot of Life!"

He turned away. The Bar Senestro stripped off his jewels, his semiarmor, and stood clad in the manner of Watson. They advanced and met in the center of the dais, two athletes, lithe, strong, handsome, their muscles aquiver with vitality and their skins silken with health. Champions of two worlds, to wrestle for truth!

A low murmur arose, crescendoing until it filled the whole coliseum. The silver-bronze pheasant flitted above the heads of all, flashing like bits of the spirit of light. And all of a sudden—

One of them fluttered down and lit on Watson's shoulder.

The murmur of the throng dropped to a dead silence. Next second a stranger thing happened. The little creature broke forth in full-throated song.

Watson instantly remembered the words of the Bar Senestro: "They sing but for the Jarados." He quietly reached up and caught the songster in his hand, and he held it up to the astonished crowd. Still the song continued. Chick held him an instant longer, and then gave him a toss high in air. He shot across the temple, a streak of melody, silver, dulcet, to the far corner of the giant Senestro.

But the thing did not jar the Senestro.

"Well done, Sir Fantom! Anyhow, 'tis your last play! I would not have it otherwise. Here's hoping you can die as prettily! Are you ready?"

"Ready? What for?" retorted Watson. "Why should I trouble myself with preparations?"

But the Rhamda Geos had now come to his side.

"Do your best, my lord. I regret only that it must be to the death. It is the first death contest in the Thomahlia for a thousand circles (years). But the Senestro has challenged the prophecy. Prove that you are not a false one! My heart is with you."

It was a good word at a needed moment. Watson stepped over onto the circular Spot of Life.

They were both barefooted. Evidently the Thomablians fought in the old, classic manner. The stone under Watson's feet was cool and invigorating. He could sense anew that quiver of magnetism and strength. It sent a thrill through his whole body, like the subtle quickening of life. He felt snappy, joyous, confident.

The Senestro was smiling, his eyes flashing with anticipation. His muscled body was a network of soft movement. His step was catlike.

"What will it be?" inquired Watson. "Name your choice of destruction, Senestro."

But the Bar shook his head.

"Not so, Sir Fantom. You shall choose the manner of your death, not I. Particular I am not, nor selfish."

"Make it wrestling, then," in his most offhand manner. He was a good wrestler, and scientific.

"Good! Are you ready?"

"Quite."

"Very well, Sir Fantom. I shall walk to the edge of the Spot and turn around. I would take no unfair advantage. Now!"

Chick turned at the same moment and strode to his edge. He turned, and it happened; just what, Chick never knew. He remembered seeing his opponent turn slowly about, and in the next split of a second he was spinning in the clutch of a tiger. Even before they struck the stone, Chick could feel the Senestro reaching for a death-hold.

And in that one second Watson knew that he was in the grip of his master.

His mind functioned like lightning. His legs and arms flashed for the counter-hold that would save him. They struck the Spot and rolled over and over; Chick caught his hold, but the Senestro broke it almost instantly. But it had saved him; for a minute they spun around like a pair of whirligigs. Watson kept on the defensive. He had not the speed and skill of the other. It was no mere test to touch the shoulders; it was a fight to the death; he was at a disadvantage. He worked desperately.

When a man fights for his life he becomes superhuman. Watson was put to something more than his skill; the sheer spirit of the Bar broke hold after hold; he was like lightning, pantherlike, subtle, vicious. Time after time he spun Chick out of his defense and bore him down into a hold of death. And each time Chick somehow wriggled out, and saved himself by a new hold. The struggle became a blur—muscle, legs, the lust for killing—and hatred. Twice Watson essayed the offensive; first he got a hammer-lock and then a half-Nelson. The Bar broke both holds immediately.

Whatever Chick knew of wrestling, the Senestro knew just a bit more. It was a

whirring mass of legs and bodies in continuous convulsion, silent except for the terrible panting of the men, and the stifled exclamations of the onlookers.

And then—

Watson grew weak. He tried once more. They spun to their feet. But before he could act the Senestro had caught him in the same flying rush as in the beginning, and had whirled him off his feet. And when he came down the Bar had an unbreakable hold.

Chick struggled in vain. The Bar tightened his grip. A spasm of pain shot through Chick's torso; he could feel his bones giving way. His strength was gone; he could see death. Another moment would have been the end.

But something happened. The Senestro miraculously let go his hold. Chick felt something soft brush against his cheek. He heard a queer snapping, and shouts of wonder, and a dreadful choking sound from the Bar. He raised himself dizzily on one arm. His eyes cleared a bit.

The great Bar was on his back; and at his throat was a snarling thing—the creature that Chick had seen in the clover leaf of the Jarados.

It was a living dog.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)



CAPTIVES

THE artist caught a bird in flight
 With pinion poised on gloried sky.
 Our sight soars, too,
 Across the blue—
 And still the bird wings high!

A voice sings of the rippling stream
 That kissed the ferns in lofty nook.
 We hear the fleet
 Illusion, sweet—
 Yet madly flows the brook!

Oh, dear one, I have captured love
 (But my heart never had a key!)—
 I love you so
 'Tis joy to know
 Your wondrous heart is free!

Edith Livingston Smith.

Mocking Bird Squares Things

by *Edgar Daniel Kramer*



TWILIGHT, soft, velvety, clinging, was settling down upon the plowed lands, and the air was sweet with the smell of new-turned sod. It was the time of solemn spiritual stillness between daylight and dark, when all nature seems to pause in prayer. The only moving things in the dusky landscape were the two horses and the tall man wearily plodding down the white streak of road, little puffs of dust lifting upward with each footfall for all the world like smoke. The only sounds upon the heavy stillness were the stumbling hoofs of the horses, the dragging steps of the man, and the musical clank-clank of the trace-chains, as they swung to and fro.

The roadway sloped gently toward the barn that loomed grotesque in the gathering shadows. The horses reached the barnyard gate and waited restlessly for the man to come up with them. He loosened the bridle reins, opened the gate, and let the animals pass. Whinnying eagerly, they trotted to the watering-trough. As the man closed the gate methodically, his tired figure straightened, stiffened, and held taut.

"Hearin' things!" he muttered, but he cast a furtive, hunted look over his shoulder, as he led the horses into the stable. He stripped off the harness and rubbed down the sweaty beasts with bunches of straw.

"I ain't hearin' things," he said to himself. "It's him sure—this time!"

Trembling hideously he, mechanically tossed feed to the horses and then stood leaning against the board partition listening intently. With little sounds of delight the horses plunged their noses into the feed boxes. Faintly at first, then more distinctly there came the crystal-clear notes of a man whistling and steadily drawing nearer.

"It's him!" The voice of the man shaking there in the shadows was little more than a gasp. "It's—it's th' Mockin' Bird!"

The whistler was now in the stretch of road to the south of the barn where the honeysuckles were growing in rich profusion upon the sloping banks of the cut. Sweetly the notes floated upon the stillness to the strains of "Auld Lang Syne." He was now at the corner of the barn; he was going past. The listener breathed more easily. No such luck! The whistling man was now hanging upon the gate, and the notes continued to rise and swell into the night.

"Well, we'll get it over with," the listening man whispered hopelessly. "I'm tired o' waitin'."

"Hello, Squealer!" The whistling broke off and a voice like the rasp of a file greeted the troubled man as he came out from the stable and turned the corner of the barn.

The two men were but blurred blots in the gathering gloom.

"You're makin' a mistake. My name's Joyce."

The man upon the gate laughed ironically, and there was a portent of imminent, torturing evil in his mirth.

"You may be Joyce now," he snarled, "but just the same you used to be Squealer Dawson."

"You're wrong."

"Th' Mockin' Bird ain't often wrong," he spoke fiercely now, "an' one o' them times was when I trusted you, Squealer."

In a twinkling the tortured man was over the gate with his fingers twisting about the Mocking Bird's throat.

"I been expectin' you, Mockin' Bird," he said, hoarse with passion.

"Cut th' rough stuff, Squealer," the Mocking Bird gasped. "If you croak me, you'll just be givin' th' whole works away. You can't get away with murder."

The Squealer's hands loosened their hold. The Mocking Bird rubbed his throat and cackled.

"What you comin' here for?" the Squealer asked accusingly.

"To pay what I owe you, Squealer." The other's voice was venom now.

"You mean?"

As they glared at each other, their eyes were mere pin-points of light in the enveloping darkness. Their breaths were but broken wheezings.

"I mean to pay you, Squealer," the Mocking Bird muttered softly, "for what you handed me six years ago."

Then he lifted his face to the stars, and the night became melodious with "Ben Bolt." As though this were a signal, a myriad voiced orchestra burst into a fury of sound from meadow and valley and hill. The whistling ceased abruptly.

"Gee, what a racket!" The Mocking Bird seemed startled. "Listen, Squealer," he went on bitterly, "you thought you'd slip me what you did, then slide out here, an' I'd never find you. I'm laughin'. Hell ain't deep enough to hide you from me. I've trailed you, an' now my time's come. You just can't get away from me."

"Well, Mockin' Bird," the Squealer

asked in a dead voice, "now you got me what are you goin' to do?"

"First," the Mocking Bird answered, "I'm goin' to the house with you, an' clean up a bit. I'm pretty dusty, you know. Then we'll have some eats. That ham smells good to me. After supper we'll finish th' little game you started six years ago." His voice fairly oozed satisfaction.

The Squealer turned and led the way to where a light shone amidst the trees, hanging so low here and there that the dew-wet leaves brushed their faces. As they stepped heavily upon the porch, the door swung open, and silhouetted in the rectangle of light, there stood a slender young woman with a little child clinging to her skirts.

"Where you been, Bob?" she asked in a worried voice.

"Worked pretty late, Nelly," the Squealer answered, "an' I had to rub down th' horses."

The men followed the woman into the kitchen which was lighted by an oil lamp, placed in the center of the table already laid for supper.

"Nelly, this is Mr.—Mr.—Bird," the Squealer said with an effort.

The Mocking Bird grinned maliciously. The woman glanced from her husband, tall and muscular, but with troubled face, to the stranger, a bit shorter than the Squealer, but with broader shoulders and a deeper chest and a face upon which was stamped much of evil. Slender, fair, with cheeks red from cooking, brown haired, she stood between the men, bewilderment in her eyes. These three seemed wrapped about with the warp and woof of tragedy.

"Pleased to meet you," she said uncertainly, timidly, extending her hand to the Mocking Bird.

"Is you a bird?" the little girl asked, as she hugged a rag doll tightly to her bosom.

"Yep," the Mocking Bird answered, and throwing back his head he trilled like a canary.

Laughing gleefully, the child ran to him. "I like you," she gurgled. "Be a bird some more."

"Gee!" breathed the Mocking Bird, a scared, strange look on his face. "Gee!"

After the men had washed-up, they drew

their chairs to the table. The child was so much taken with the stranger that she insisted upon sitting beside him.

"I want to ask you-all a question." The Mocking Bird paused in the process of buttering a fluffy biscuit. "Th'—Joyce there," he leered, "knows all about what I'm sayin'. It's to you, Mrs. Joyce, that I'm speakin' especially."

The woman carried the coffee-pot to the stove and resumed her place at the table.

"Once there was—" the Mocking Bird began.

"A fairy story! A fairy story!" the child interrupted.

"Nix, baby," the Mocking Bird answered, pinching her cheek, "this ain't no fairy tale. This is gospel."

The Squealer pushed his plate from him and clumped back in his chair. Nervously he filled his pipe and tamped the tobacco in with his thumb. There was a ghost of fear in the woman's eyes, as her gaze shifted from one man to the other. The child was very gravely watching the speaker.

"There were two guys," the Mocking Bird continued, "two guys who were pals. Then trouble came, an' one guy, so as to save himself, squealed on his buddy."

The speaker's voice had become surly and ugly. The child drew away. The woman became frightened. The Squealer clumsily lit his pipe.

"Suppose he didn't squeal?" the Squealer asked, leaning forward across the table.

"Can that stuff!" the Mocking Bird laughed hoarsely. "He squealed all right, all right."

"But suppose he didn't?" the Squealer reiterated.

"Bunk!" the Mocking Bird growled. "He was yellow clean through." He paused. "Anyway his pal did five years in the stir."

The woman was now completely bewildered.

"Five years in State's prison," the Mocking Bird explained, "gives a guy lots o' time to plan his revenge. Five years!"

The Squealer and the Mocking Bird stared into each other's eyes—one depressed, the other exultant.

"What would you do in that guy's

place?" the Mocking Bird addressed the Squealer.

"I'd make sure whether he squealed."

"Suppose you knew he did? What would you do then?"

The Squealer shook his head helplessly.

"What would you do?" the Mocking Bird turned to the woman.

"No man would do such a thing," she answered.

The Squealer shivered.

"No *man*," the Mocking Bird gloated; "but this guy did."

"Then I would punish him—"

"Yes—" the Mocking Bird broke in, enjoying the torture he was inflicting upon the other man.

"I'd make him suffer."

"What would you do?" The Mocking Bird's voice broke with eagerness.

"I'd make him suffer by returnin' good for evil."

"Good for evil?" The Mocking Bird lurched to his feet. "Woman, I'm laughin'."

The Squealer sprang up, too. Whimpering, the child hid her face in her mother's lap.

"You don't understand," the Mocking Bird raged. "Five years in hell, an' just because th' guy you trusted had a yellow streak! Five years of brutal guards an' narrow cells an' gloomy gray walls! Five years of curses an' blows an' waitin' for to even up th' score! Five years! Gawd!"

At a sign from the Squealer his wife gathered the child in her arms and carried her up the narrow stairs.

"Good for evil!" the enraged man croaked. "Come on, Squealer; we'll settle this in th' open air like men. Now's your time to kick in."

The door slammed behind them and once more they were under the stars.

"Well, Mockin' Bird," the Squealer asked, "what are you goin' to do?"

"Kinda interested, ain't you? Are you afraid, Squealer?"

"If it wasn't for them back there," the Squealer jerked his thumb over his shoulder—"I'd break you with my hands an' hang for you. That's how much I'm afraid, Mockin' Bird."

"Squealer," the Mocking Bird replied, "I came up here to croak you. I thought it would be a fine joke to let your wife pass sentence on you. Good for evil! Ain't there some queer ginks in th' world? Good for evil! Get that?"

A light suddenly flashed out through the windows of the second floor.

"Puttin' th' kid to bed," the Squealer mumbled to himself.

"But I've changed my mind, Squealer. I ain't goin' to croak you. I'm goin' to let you live. Your wife said make you suffer. I'm goin' to let you live so you can suffer more. You were a skunk, an' them five years was hell!"

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry?" the Mocking Bird laughed. "That didn't lessen th' sting o' them. That didn't make th' time any shorter. I been out for two months now, huntin' you. You're my meat now, Squealer. But I'm goin' to let you live, so that you'll know I'm always just around th' corner, liable to turn up any time an' make you happy. See? That's better'n croakin' you, an' you'll enjoy it more."

The Squealer remained silent.

"That ain't all," his tormentor snarled. "I'm goin' to get some real satisfaction, too. I'm goin' to give you th' wallop in' of your life. I'm goin' to tan your yellow hide. That 'll be part o' my payment. I'll make good in instalments. I'm goin' to make you suffer, an' that's takin' your better half's advice. Put up your dukes."

Here was a primitive battle of primitive men. Here were no rests, no rules. Here was the game in the raw. The veneer of civilization was sloughed off with the first impact of fist upon flesh. There in the dark they went to the turf, two brutes, biting, clawing, striking in desperation. They rose and stood toe to toe, exchanging blows that sounded like the reports of quick-firing rifles. Like shadowy gladiators they struggled, now one on the ground, now the other, now both rolling over and over and wrestling in a frenzy of energy.

Again on their feet, breathing hard, neither giving ground, reeking with sweat, each putting into every blow all the strength of his physical manhood, they

fought on, asking no quarter and giving none. Then one of the combatants suddenly doubled up like a jack-knife and lay still.

"That's only part o' what's comin' to you," the Mocking Bird breathed brokenly, as he spurned his fallen antagonist with his foot. "This is only th' first instalment. I'm just beginnin' to pay good for evil," he ended with a sneer.

He bent low over the Squealer.

"Out for a while an' dead to th' world," he exulted. "Nothin' worryin' him now!"

From behind him there came an ear-splitting scream, another and then another. The Mocking Bird turned to see the upper story of the frame house burst into flames. The kitchen door jerked open and the woman rushed out screaming. A dull cloud of smoke rolled out after her. Upon the turf lay the Squealer, knocked-out, unconscious.

"My baby! My baby!" the mother shrieked. "Oh, Bob! Oh, Bob!" She sank upon her knees by her husband and shook him furiously in a wild fit of desperation. "Oh, Bob!" she sobbed. "The baby!" But the Squealer was deaf to her appeals.

In a daze, the Mocking Bird, bruised and battered, stared from these two to the burning house. The flames were mounting higher and higher. Already they had licked through one part of the roof. For only a fleeting moment the little girl appeared in one of the windows that overlooked the porch. She was still clutching the rag doll to her heart and weeping in hideous terror. The Mocking Bird straightened and rubbed his hands over his eyes.

"Oh, Bob!" the hysterical mother kept repeating. "Baby's in there! I was worried about you an' I came down-stairs. She musta knocked over th' lamp. Th' stairs were all smoke an' I couldn't go back to her."

"I rocked him to sleep," the Mocking Bird was saying to himself, as his brain cleared, "so I guess it's up to me."

He was not new to second-story work and he scrambled to the porch roof as easily as a cat, then disappeared in the blazing furnace.

Slowly the Squealer opened his eyes. "What's th' matter?" he asked weakly.

"Th' baby's in there," his wife shrieked.

The Squealer jerked to his knees and then struggled to his feet, swaying there in the weird glow from his burning dwelling. His brain was still muddled, but he staggered toward the open kitchen door, from which there belched a thick cloud of smoke. Just as he was about to enter, the Mocking Bird stumbled out and brushed him aside. In his arms he carried a bundle swathed in bedclothes. With odd little jerking movements, he unsteadily made his way to the stricken mother, who lay with her face to the earth. Then he crumpled up and sprawled there in the warm glow like one who had fallen asleep.

With a cry of joy the mother seized the little girl and heaped her with warm caresses. The Squealer bent over his enemy.

"Plucky little kid," the latter was mumbling; "plucky little kid."

"Mockin' Bird!" The Squealer bent closer.

"Hello, folks!" The Mocking Bird's eyelids lifted. "Somethin's been burned out o' me. Anyway, I ain't th' same guy that come here. I feel like laughin', but it hurts too much."

The woman, too, now leaned over him, weeping, and the little child stared down at him with wonder eyes.

"Good for evil, kid," he whispered weakly. "That's what your mother said. Now ain't that one funny joke?"

Then the Mocking Bird stiffened spasmodically and lay very still with a queer smile as of puzzled surprise upon his face. He had accomplished what he had come for. He had, in truth, squared many things.



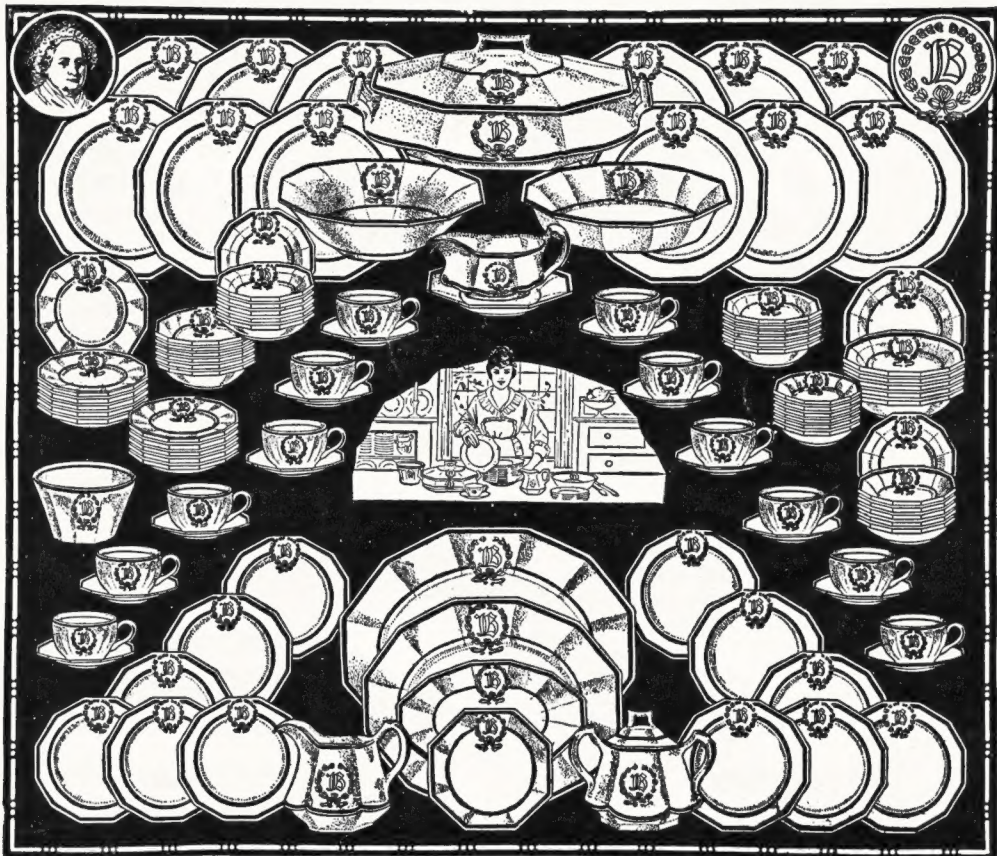
THE BRIDEGROOM'S PRAYER

GOD, from Whom all blessings flow—
 Thou Who didst grant my soul to know
 This woman fair—
 Show me the path on which to tread
 Now and fore'er.
 My heart, the treasure-house wherein
 Is stored this virgin's love,
 Stands now in dread.

Rash, foolish mortals all around me smile—
 "On with the dance!"—not knowing, God, the while
 That else than joy and pride
 In having her
 Hath made me silent as Christ's sepulcher
 When after He, the Jew of Nazareth,
 Was taken to the Cross and crucified. . . .
 I am silent, near, as though myself in death!

God, grant me wisdom, courage, strength,
 Fear of Thy wrath, that I may hope, at length,
 To know for sure
 That I, clay mortal, am full worthy of
 This woman who in holy faith and trust
 Hath blessed me with her sacred jewel, Love,
 Untarnished by a taint of worldly lust—
 Love that shall, through the Grace of Thee above,
 Always endure.

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